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Galt, John

STANLEY BUXTON;

OR,

THE SCHOOLFELLOWS.

**"While guile is guiltless, and life's business play,
Friendships are formed that never know decay."**

BY

**THE AUTHOR OF "ANNALS OF THE PARISH,"
"LAWRIE TODD," &c. &c.**

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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PREFACE.

ART consists in representing fiction as truth, by giving to the creations of fancy the colours and characteristics of Nature. The following story has had this object in view.

It is not probable that the feelings chiefly described can have been often felt; but the author thinks that in the several situations in which he has placed his principal *dramatis personæ*, real persons would have been affected as he has attempted to delineate.

By those, and they are the majority, who do not discriminate between the conduct that results from habit and the actions dictated by resolution, some of his characters may at first

not be understood ; but by the reflecting few, who judge of others by imagining themselves in their circumstances, perhaps he will not be considered to have failed, nor be deemed in the execution altogether common-place, however trite and familiar the still-life of his scenes may appear. In the familiar dialogues he has endeavoured to imitate the freedom and ease of actual life.

31st Dec. 1831.

STANLEY BUXTON;

OR,

THE SCHOOLFELLOWS.

CHAPTER I.

THE school of Mr. Palmer, or, as the boys called him, Dominie Palmy—in allusion to a certain department of his duties, in the performance of which they alleged he enjoyed heartfelt satisfaction—was in its day one of the best in the West of Scotland. It was a superstructure formed on the parochial establishment, for, in addition to serving as a school to the parish, it in some respects aspired to the dignity of an academy; indeed, the Dominie's wife never spoke of it with an inferior title; and Mrs. Keckle, the Minister's better half, always called it the semindary, though the

VOL. I.

B

reverend gentleman took pains to correct her pronunciation.

The school was indebted for this distinguished rank chiefly to the enterprise of the Dominie himself, a probationer of the Kirk, who, like many others, not falling under the fostering eye-shine of a patron, had early in life accepted the charge, with the additional offices, according to use and wont, of precentor and session-clerk. The former, however, he only retained one Sunday, for, as the elders and luckies of the time said, his voice had a "want in the Psalm," though they acknowledged that no man "could proclaim the bands or the remembering prayer in a finer style of language." He was in consequence constrained to hire, at half wages, one Robin Nasal, a godly weaver, that every body said sung in the warm and lown summer afternoons as composing and melodious as a bum-bee.

No sooner had Mr. Palmer been installed, than he looked out for a managing, thorough-handed wife, and, in the course of the same year, married Mrs. Napery, a widow, the

housekeeper to Laird Ralston, one of the principal heritors. She was ten years—some said fifteen—older than himself; but as age, to a certain degree, improves sundry commodities, it cannot be a fault in the fair sex; at least, for his purpose her superiority in years was no drawback. On the contrary, the elderly sedate of the parish deemed the match highly prudent, and the more so, when he rented the house, with the two trees and the parterre, that had been the old Leddy Ralston's jointure house, and promulgated his intention of taking pupils. Some of the most sagacious carlins of the parish inquired of each other, and of Mrs. Keckle, what sort of things pupils were; and that erudite lady translated, from a classical tongue, that they were boarders not yet just come to the degree of colleginers. It thus so happened that the school of Greenknowes came, in process of time, to be the brag of the country side; for the master had, in the course of a few years, fifteen pupils, who were better to him than twice the minister's stipend, over and above all his legitimate dues and parochial perquisites as session-

clerk; when bridals and baptisms were in the wind, to say nothing of a sly compliment now and then to soothe a crying sin.

The scholars, besides the natives of the parish, children of the farmers and cotters, consisted of the boarders, boys from the East and West Indies, with a sprinkling of the seed of Glasgow, together with Willy Ralston, the Laird's son, who was predestinated by his father to the advocate-line in Edinburgh; and Henry Franks, the son of a London merchant, whom experience had taught to have a high respect for the Scottish system of education, which in his opinion tended to sharpen the wits of those with whom he had occasional dealings.

Philosophers have never yet determined by what secret law and sympathy like draws to like, and therefore I need not presume to meddle with so abstruse a problem, but come at once to a fact.

Ralston and Franks having arrived on the same evening at the Dominie's, became, from their first interview, sworn brothers, although the two most dissimilar striplings in the academy. Ralston, notwithstanding the sounding

brass vocation to which his father had ordained him, was one of the soberest lads in the whole juvenile community. Modest in his demeanour, solicitous in his studies, gentle in his temper, altogether a mild, intelligent, and well-conducted youth, but not in talent above mediocrity ; nor was the spring of his activity of the most elastic kind, insomuch, that although considered as one of the best boys in the school, the master did not anticipate that he would ever prove, as he said, " a productive man."

Franks was of a different description ; cheerful, active, careless in his lessons, fiery in his temper, but without malice ; lively, and much under the impulse of the moment ; curious in his remarks on others, so much so as to evince something like originality of mind, and yet affording no very encouraging promise of a capacity to attain distinction.

Such were the friends who, during the three years they remained at Greenknowes, were an example of companionship to all their fellows. At the end of that period they were removed to Glasgow College, but before three months had expired old Laird Ralston died, and Willy,

contented with a respectable, unencumbered inheritance, abandoned the design of going to the bar, and next year accompanied his friend to Oxford, where he entered himself with him a gentleman commoner of Belial College, as Mrs. Palmer called it, with no other intention, than the pleasure of being in his society, and of seeing what little of the world can be seen there.

After they had been about two years at the University, old Mr. Franks deemed the education of his son sufficiently complete, and recalled him to London, to take a place in the counting-house. Ralston, at the same time, returned to Scotland, and set himself down as a country gentleman at Gowans, his paternal estate, near Greenknowes. But, in accordance to the harmony of their youthful intimacy, before separating they agreed to be regular correspondents for life, being desirous of perpetuating that friendship which Fate seemed to rupture by casting their lots so widely apart, and in scenes so different—the one in the metropolis of the empire, and the other in the rural, quiet neighbourhood of an obscure Scot-

tish village. Greenknowes, indeed, was situated so remote from the thoroughfares of the kingdom as to have only a by-post once a week, when the letters were brought from Glower, a town seven miles distant, by Nanse Gather, an old woman, who had upwards of thirty-seven years enjoyed the trust, together with certain emoluments from the errands of the wives of Greenknowes, when their thrift required needles and pins, and such other concerns of householdry as did not justify themselves in undertaking the journey, except when so inclined.

It is not, however, my intention to describe the accidents and adventures which befell the schoolfellows, but to show from their letters, which have curiously fallen into my hands,—and thereby hangs a tale,—their respective observations on the public and the sequestered world; for although it would be difficult to conceive two situations more different in events and circumstances than those of our two heroes, yet the occurrences which affected them both, dovetailed in the most dramatic manner into each other. Their natural dissimilarity of character was not more opposite than the respective

castes of their lives; but still their destinies were mingled, and curiously interwoven with the fate and fortunes of others, in whom it could not have been previously imagined they would ever be mutually interested.

CHAPTER II.

RALSTON, on his return to Gowans from England, took possession of his inheritance in an easy, quiet manner, congenial to his good natured character.

The household, during the latter years of the old Laird, his father, had, from the death of his mother, been ruled by a regency, in the person of Miss Sibby Ruart, a distant relation. Possessed of many commendable qualities, in addition to a blithe, rummaging, and scolding hostility to all sorts of domestic negligence, she prided herself on making, at the shortest notice, a "meconomy dinner of cold meat, with only a blandishment of her own sauce." This she called her stroke of genius, not very well knowing what the term meant; but she had once been a winter

in Edinburgh, and much among the Athenian blues, from whom she learned that phrase, and guessed that it implied excellence.

Ralston saw that it would essentially contribute to his own comfort not to disturb the existing administration of his household affairs, and Miss Sibby was accordingly continued in office, and in all the plenitude of her prerogatives; which Mrs. Keckle, the Minister's wife, when she saw him, extolled as the best proof he could give of his sagacity till he got a wife.

"Then," said she, "there must be an alteration: but really Miss Sibby has such an expedient, that ye'll never miss the want of a leddy, if ye can conform to her frugalities."

Little did Mrs. Keckle suspect, when she uttered that sentence, she was speaking the predictions of prophecy, for in the end it so fell out that Ralston found all his yeas and his nays so strictly and so well consulted, and so judiciously attended to by Miss Sibby, that he saw no possible need of a wife in his establishment, but only cause to apprehend that, perhaps, a Mrs. Ralston might prove the mo-

ther of—what Miss Sibby called children—anarchy and confusion.

I mention the circumstance, however, to apprise the courteous reader only what kind of character the Laird really was—an ordained bachelor; for at the time I am speaking he was a young man, somewhat spruce in his attire, addicted to field sports, and remarkable for a happy moderation of spirits, not easily shaken from their propriety.

When he had taken possession of the Gowans some six or seven weeks, Nanse Gather the post-woman brought a letter, for which she demanded, according to the rates of those days, a shilling for the King, and, as she said, a penny gratis for the delivery. Miss Sibby, on hearing from the servant that brought it in, such an extortionate demand, threw aside the seam on which she was engaged, to ascertain the correctness of the charge herself; and correct it proved to be, for as Nanse said,

“ It ’s come out of an origin in London, and surely, Miss Sibby; the King and his counsellors there, are not men so void of a capacity as to

mark an unrighteous postage. So ye must just pay me, for as sure as death ye may see it's a London come frae letter."

"Well, Nanse," replied Miss Sibby, "since better cannot be made o't, there's the shilling, but pennies I have none."

"I'll never contravert that," said Nanse, "for though ye be void of silver and gold, ye have much better. It's a bleak night, and an easterly wind; and I'm creditably informed, Miss Sibby, that the old guardevine would bear a squeeze, if ye had only the good-will."

The insinuation was complied with, and by this economy Miss Sibby saved a penny, whatever was the cost of the dram, and Nanse was on the eve of retiring, when she again turned round, and holding another letter in her hand, said, "Can ye 'terpret that, Miss Sibby? it has the London scores on it, but they're all in red, which passes my understanding."

Miss Sibby looked at the letter, and told her it was franked and addressed to Mrs. Palmer, the schoolmaster's wife, whom the courteous reader will be pleased to recollect was originally the housekeeper at the Gowans during the old

Laird's time; and, indeed, was the immediate premier of the household before Miss Sibby herself was called to the unfettered Regency.

Nanse then went on the remainder of her journey to Greenknowes, and Miss Sibby returned into the parlour, laid the Laird's letter on the table, and resumed her needlework: the Laird himself was then abroad with his gun, and not expected till the evening.

"I wonder," said Miss Sibby to herself, threading her needle, "what Mrs. Palmer's letter can be about? what can she have for a correspondence with London?" and then suddenly recollecting that her eldest sister was married to the valet of Lord Errington, she concluded that it must have come from her. "But it is odd," she subjoined, ruminating aloud; "what can be in that letter, for the sisters have had no intercourse for these many years? It must be something extraordinary that has brought no less than two London letters in one day to our parish—a frank too! Had it been to the master himself, who has boarders from out of the four airts of the wind, it would not have been surprising; but his wife, a

homely discreet woman to be colleaguings with Londoners, and getting letters, is a marvel that merits examination."

In the evening, when Ralston returned from the moors, Miss Sibby presented the letter with a flourish, exclaiming at the same time, "There!" as if she were conferring a dainty on a delighted child; but he received it coolly and composedly, and looking at the superscription; and then at the seal before opening it, said,

"It is from my old friend Franks—I was beginning to weary—Strange! I was thinking of him all this morning."

He then read the letter, and when he had done so, remained for some time silent and thoughtful. The contents were evidently different from what he had expected, at least, his previous manner implied no anticipation of aught more interesting than common tidings. But while the servant was laying the cloth for his late and solitary dinner, he seemed entirely absorbed, and frequently looked at the contents of the letter, as if by a more careful perusal he could better discern the meaning.

Miss Sibby, who was busy with her patchwork

at an adjacent table, seeing him anxious and thoughtful, was curious to hear what could have affected him to such a degree; but not well knowing how a question from her might be received, said, without pretending to notice his abstracted manner,

“Do you know, Mrs. Palmer has had a letter from London too?”

“Has she?” replied Ralston, with so little reflection as to be almost mechanical; “What can it be about?”

“Nay, that’s just what I have been thinking; what, indeed, can it be about? But, no doubt, it has come from her sister.”

“Her sister! what sister?”

“She has a sister married to Lord Errington’s valet de chambre, and the letter was franked by my Lord; no doubt, therefore, it has been from her.”

“How has it happened that she has a sister married?” inquired Ralston, relapsing into his fit of absence.

“Did you not recollect that,” replied the Lady; “but I need not wonder you have forgotten it. When Mrs. Palmer was house-

keeper here, her sister was married to my Lord's gentleman, as the rumour ran, and great things were done for her at the time, for you know she was my Lady's own maid. But in little more than a year, she fell off from all correspondence with her friends in this part of the country, and but for the letter which has this day come to pass, I might never have recollected her; and truly she may be dead and buried many-a-day for aught I know to the contrary, and the letter may concern some other purpose; for great folks' servants easily get franks, which is a saving and a perquisite."

"It is very odd," said Ralston, inwardly to himself, "that the only letters to the parish, and from such different hands, should on the same day and to such a sequestered nook of the world as this, come with the same topic?"

"Does your letter," cried Miss Sibby, with a slight accent of surprise, "relate to Mrs. Palmer's?"

"Not exactly, perhaps, but it concerns something interesting to the Errington family,

and it is not improbable that the circumstance to which I allude, may be the cause of the letter to Mrs. Palmer."

"Goodness! and what is that?"

"You shall hear."

CHAPTER III.

THE young Laird, having finished dinner, took up the letter which was lying open on the table, and Miss Sibby Ruart, laying down her needle-work, drew her chair towards him with greedy ears, as he thus read :

London.

“DEAR RALSTON,

“According to a law in the system of Nature, all letter-writers begin their epistles by saying something of themselves. I am at this instant under its influence, although there is nothing to tell you, either of me or mine, in the slightest degree interesting—save that, on Monday, I mounted the stool of fortune, in the counting-house, which, I would whisper in your

ear, is a scene not much to my mind; but as business is only the employment of time under volition, and pleasure no other than the same thing under desire, I have encouraging hopes of myself, that when my present tasks shall have grown to habitude, the desk will not be disagreeable. Rivington, one of the clerks, an old exquisite of his kind, with a formal, powdered tie-wig, with two Ionic curls over his ears, a pen behind the right one, and spectacles on nose, on my observing to him that the stools were too tall, said significantly that they were like business, and would grow pleasanter in time. I am consoled by this philosophy.

“But if egotistical materials be scant, I have something to tell you that has not a little perplexed me. Our old Christ-church acquaintance, Stanley Buxton, is now Lord Errington. His father died some time ago, and left him, with the title, upwards of thirty thousand a year; and since that event he has become the most distressed of mankind. I met him at dinner lately; and when the party broke up, he took my arm, dismissing his car-

riage, and said, in rather a particular manner, 'I am so glad to see an old friend, that I will walk home with you, Franks; the night is fine, and the fresh, cool air delightful.'

"These words were, in themselves, but words of course; but the emphasis which he laid on the expression 'an old friend,' betrayed emotion and anxiety.

"As we walked along, he added, with an accent still more disturbed:

"Do you know, that the change in my circumstances has been attended with an alteration in other things, quite as great. Lady Errington, my mother, seems to be inspired with a singular aversion towards me. She has forbidden me to approach her—as if by assuming the title I had committed some offence, and because I have objected to an unbecoming match, which she has set her mind on; Howard, my father's valet, has also suddenly become audaciously familiar; and Maria Howard his daughter, whom you have heard me speak of, is considered by all the house as adopted by my mother, and treated in every respect as my two sisters. It is her that Lady Errington

wishes me to marry. In my father's time, this Maria was always regarded with particular kindness by Lady Errington, but now she is cherished with, I may say, inordinate distinction; and it is because I take no particular interest in her, that my mother is so offended. All this has, like a blight, withered my peace of mind more than I can well express.

“ ‘Just before leaving my own house this evening, Howard's wife met me on the stairs; I happened to pass her without speaking, which I have done often and often before; but on this occasion she burst into tears, and exclaimed, ‘Is this all the satisfaction to be had from greatness?’

“ ‘I was touched with the tone of grief in which she said this; for ever since my childhood she has been a favourite with me. I held out my hand, and chidingly reproached her for thinking so deeply of an inadvertency. Her tears, however, only flowed faster, and she hurried away. What can be the meaning of this strange mystery?’

“ I can only give you an imperfect outline of what Errington said, but no adequate im-

pression of his earnestness. Your own mind will probably suggest the same thing that occurred to mine, when I advised him to get rid of the Howards. That insolence of the man speaks volumes ; but the most singular circumstance among the causes of Errington's unhappiness is, the endeavour, as sudden as extraordinary, on the part of his mother, to induce him to fasten his affections on Maria—I only use his own words.

“That there is something, therefore, rotten in the state of Denmark, is manifest ; and yet Lady Errington has been always esteemed as one of the most punctilious, alike of her sex and rank. However, I have been told that for several years after the birth of our friend, she became exceedingly recluse ; some called it a morbid melancholy, and it was alleged that now and then it broke into paroxysms of wildness : perhaps her present unaccountable conduct may spring from the same cause. It is certain that she never was particularly fond of Stanley, much less so than mothers are of their offspring ; and he describes her now as if she were

actuated by the energy of hatred. His case baffles counsel, and the readiness with which he spoke of it, shows how much it engrosses his whole mind. Although we were formerly intimate, yet our friendship was not of such a familiar kind as to entitle me to such confidence, and so abruptly; but the poor fellow says the world is so turned upside down to him, that he is glad to disburthen himself to any one who does not seem to be changed,—write me soon, and say what you think of this.

“ I saw our old Creole chum Humphries the other day; since he left Dominie Palmy’s school he has been at Jamaica, but the climate did not agree with him, and still less the business of a planter; so he would be a soldier, “ the sweet Willy, Oh !” and is now a Major hot from the Peninsula, and full of “ ambuscadoes Spanish blades.” He was happy to hear of you; and when I told him you had determined to be a gentleman, and live at home at ease, he said, in his old rattling way, that when he visited Greenknowes, he had no doubt of finding you

a bachelor overgrown with ivy ; a picturesque idea that has mightily amused my imagination.

Yours ever, &c.

“ HENRY FRANKS.”

The Laird read the entire letter without any particular pause, and without comment. He then laid it down, and lifting his head, looked at Miss Sibby in silence, as if he expected some remark from her ; nor was he disappointed.

“ This is, I must observe,” said she, “ news of a very heinous quality : but I wonder what can be in Mrs. Palmer’s letter ? no doubt it was from her sister. Mrs. Howard, we have long ago heard, ruled the roast with Lady Errington. Don’t you think, Mr. Ralston, that I might, by way of accident, just take a step over, the morn’s morning, to the academy house, and call in a friendly way on Mrs. Palmer ? I’ll say nothing of what we have heard, but maybe she’ll no be in such a state of suspicion as to be costive to a far-off question—Really, it’s an affecting story, Mr. Ralston.”

“ It is so,” was the reply, sedately uttered,

“very ; but I rejoice that his Lordship has so soon and so candidly made Henry Franks his confidant, for with all the immethodical current of Henry’s reflections, there is more under his black curls than in many grey heads ; and it is very evident that there is a secret of some kind or other, that ought to be sifted.”

“Secret ! can that be doubted ?” exclaimed Miss Sibby ; “it’s as plain to me as the cock on the steeple.”

“What is ?”

“That the widow’s a wanting wanton ;—and, the sorrowful heart of Mrs. Howard ?—don’t you think that’s a crim. con. ?”

“I don’t think so ; there are too many jangling interests at work for it to be owing to any cause of that kind. Why does her Ladyship wish her son, a peer of the realm, to marry a servant’s daughter ; though she herself took a fancy to the girl when it was but an infant ? It accords not with the usages and notions of society in this country. Then the insolence of Howard, the nature of which, however, is not explained. If he seek the advancement of his

child, would he not rather be all sycophancy ; and why, in the midst of such ravelled feelings, is Mrs. Howard so disturbed at the seeming negligence of her young Lord ?—It is all very puzzling.”

“It is too late to-night,” said Miss Sibby Ruart, “but I will see Mrs. Palmer in the morning.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE Laird was in the field, in arms against the partridges, by break of day, and Miss Sibby, a full hour before her wonted time, had rung her bell and ordered breakfast, dressed for the intended visit.

“The day is overcast, and it threatens rain,” said she apprehensively to the kettle-bearer, as she infused the tea, throwing at the same time a glance at the window and the landscape beyond, where the shadows of the September clouds were swiftly in succession coursing over it; and, as she replaced the canister in the tea-chest, and the spoon with which she lifted the fragrant herb back in her own saucer, she threw another inquiring look at the window, adding,

“Set the umbrella ready, and my pattens at the door, for I fear the roads are dubby.”

She then engaged herself, with rather more than her usual activity, in the decomposition of the breakfast ingredients, and was soon on the path across the bean-field which led from the house of Gowans to the village.

The appearance of Miss Sibby was in accordance with the occasion, the localities of the place, and the character of the weather. She had obviously some business in hand, for, when the path allowed, she took off her pattens and carried them, which showed that she was impelled by a haste that would not brook a dainty picking of her steps. Her bonnet was not her best; its church-going days were over, and it was adorned with washen ribbons, of a dark lilac-colour, dyed with ink. Nor was her shawl the beautiful yellow cashmere that her cousin the Colonel sent from India, but an imitation from the Paisley looms, a handsomer pattern, however, though only of cotton. Her gown was an Irish ruby-coloured poplin, which had belonged to her mother, brought again into

vogue by ever-revolving fashion. It looked quite as well as a morine at a distance, and in the country every one does not know the difference between that stuff and a poplin.

When Miss Sibby was half-way across the field, the skirt of a showery squall met her full in the face, and obliged her to spread the umbrella, and to mount her pattens. It required, indeed, both valour of heart and strength of hand to push the umbrella against the wind, which, sometimes a little overly obstreperous, tirmed up and meddled with Miss Sibby's sacred petticoats in the most unruly manner. However, she reached the stile at the end of the field after a hard struggle, but in mounting to step over into the road, the blast lost all shame, and Mr. Palmer's boys happening to be passing to school, seeing her standing on the stile like a full-blown tulip, her hems above the bows of her bonnet, gave a licentious shout at the sight of her affliction. Thus it came to pass, that when she reached the academy house, with the two trees and parterre in front, she was in such a state of agitation, occasioned by the irre-

verent blast and brats, as by breathless panting, haste, terror, and outraged modesty, to be for some time unable to execute the purposes of her visit.

When at last her disturbance had subsided, Mrs. Palmer said that it was extraordinary she should have ventured abroad in such a day. "We have not," said the mistress, "had such blowy weather this season before; it's a foretaste of winter."

"It was a fine breezy morning when I left the Gowans," replied Miss Sibby, "and I just came out to get the air about me."

"And ye have gotten that, I trow," said Mrs. Palmer with a laugh, "for I saw your topsy-turvy on the stile."

"Really your laddies ought to be punished, Mrs. Palmer. I'm sure you have a sore time o't with such rampyors—they're no now like the douce callans of auld lang syne, when our Laird was one of your flock, with that fine stirring boy Harry Franks the Londoner. Do you know he's now learning trade with his father in London?"

"It was always so intended by the old gen-

tleman," replied Mrs. Palmer; "but we have heard nothing concerning him for years."

"That I never doubt; London is a place where the memory does not keep mark, as ye have had an experience in your own sister, Mrs. Howard. She's really void of naturalty never to write you."

"Oh, greatly to our amazement, we had a letter from her yesterday."

"No' possible! And what does she say for herself? how can she ever think ye'll forgive her long silence?"

"Poor woman!" said Mrs. Palmer, "she's no' in comfort."

"Ye might have been sure of that when ye saw the letter; neither kith nor kin remember friends till they have need of them. What's her request?"

"It's only to tell me, that the old Lord has wonne away; and that the young one, whom she nursed, is not just the bairn she hoped he would have been."

"That's not uncommon in this uncertain world; but what says she of her good man?"

"Very little, but that he is in good health,

and aye as cordially kind ; a thought grieved, however, at the unbiddable nature of his new master, which grieves also, my sister says, the Lady mother, who has a great taking for their daughter, and would do every thing in her power to help her in the world."

"Ay ! And is there no other news from London ? but I may guess no', for your letter, I perceive, has been one of sorrow for sympathy, —but it's the lot of human nature to suffer, although I really think, unless it's some very instant case, folks in London should not put their friends to such high postage without telling them the news. They say cocklico's the fashionable colour, does your sister say so ?"

"My sister, poor woman ! has had other tow on her rock, and I ought to let you see her letter, for it's an edification to read it, but I have left it on the drawers' head in my own room."

"Oh, don't give yourself the trouble to look for it ; and yet, as the Minister said last Sabbath, in speaking of the death of Absalom, —'A tear of love, shed from the heart, is a blessed thing in the moral eye of a friend ;'

and considering that your sister is so uncomfortable, it must be a fine admonition to hear what she has said : I believe that she was always a most sympatheezing letter-writer ?”

“ Just excuse me for a moment, and I’ll bring the letter.”

“ It’s too much trouble, I can see it again.”

“ Very well, Miss Sibby, when you please, at any other time. And how comes the Laird on with his shooting ? yon was a pair of nice partridges that he sent me on Saturday, as plump as suet-dumplings.”

Miss Sibby looked somewhat bamboozled, but her presence of mind returned, and she added,

“ I wonder how it is that the gentlemen are all so taken up with the hares and the slaughtering of innocent birds ; but I suppose it helps to keep them out of other mischief. It maybe would be well for some of them, were there more shooting about London, for, from what you have been telling me of this young Lord Errington, I think he cannot be much of a

sportsman : Does your sister say what's his general character ? It's a great pity to hear of a young man of his degree so addicted."

"On that point she is not particular," replied Mrs. Palmer; and Miss Sibby, looking as 'twere to the heavens, exclaimed,

"Dear me, it will be another shower ; this is really an unsettled day, and I must stay till the cloud clears. If it were but for pastime, I may therefore as well look at your sister's letter before I go ; but I am troublesome by waiting, for you have a large family to guide, Mrs. Palmer, and can ill afford to waste your time with me."

Mrs. Palmer, without making any answer, immediately went for the letter, and having given it to Miss Sibby, begged her pardon for a minute or two, as she had some orders to see to in the kitchen concerning the preparations for the boys' dinner.

CHAPTER V.

THE letter was written in a crabbed hand, and Miss Sibby was not an accomplished reader ; she had, therefore, occasion to scan it over several times before she could make its contents out to her own satisfaction. It ought not, however, to have been even to her very difficult, for, in fact, the writing was more distinct than it seemed, and differed greatly from many fair specimens we ourselves have met with, which looked perfectly perspicuous till examined, when they were found to be as unintelligible as Hebrew to the inhabitants of Nova Zembla. It was as follows :—

Errington Castle.

“MY DEAREST SISTER,

“IT is now so long since I heard from you, that I begin to think you have surely for-

gotten me, and I write these few lines to let you know that there is still one in the living world that flattered herself she was dear to you. But no matter; it is the fortune of this life, which is full of disappointments, as we have lately largely experienced in Errington Castle, which may well be called the house of mourning. Our excellent master, the good Lord Errington, as he well merited to be named, was gathered to his fathers about two months ago, in the family vault, with all suitable honours, much and justly regretted. The young man who has succeeded is not, in many respects, so great a character, though for all that, were he not of such a degree as he is, he would be a pleasure to any parent; but he is not of a right obedient and dutiful disposition, and is in open rebellion against her Ladyship, because she wishes him to marry her protégée, our darling child Maria, whom her Ladyship has so long cherished as a pet, along with Lady Julia and Lady Agnes, her own legitimate daughters. You may think it is the spite and pride of Howard and me because he will not marry her, that make us displeased with his insubordi-

nation ; but surely we have a regard for our own beloved child, which she certainly is, and it would give us pleasure were she made his lady ; but, if he will not, no doubt he may look another way, and find as good, for he has good thirty thousand pounds a year ; but there would be an ease of mind if the wedding were once over,—and we are afraid she will cast herself away, which would be most calamitous.

“What adds to the molestation we at this time suffer, and have suffered for some time before the death of my Lord, is, that Lady Errington has taken a great aversion to the young man, which confuses us much ; for if he will not behave as a son to her, and she to him prove a loving mother as she ought to be, and as there was such good reason to expect, the result may be a consternation to us all, which makes me very uneasy, especially when I think how he stormed at Howard for advising him to marry our sweet girl Maria. But this life is full of trials, and we must trust that all will yet be well, for every thing that comes to pass is in the hands

of the Lord. So no more at present, but remains your affectionate sister till death,

“MARTHA HOWARD.”

By the time Miss Sibby had finished the perusal, Mrs. Palmer, having completed her culinary instructions in the kitchen, returned into the room, and, taking a seat, said,

“Is not that a very surprising epistle? If what Martha say be true, I must say likewise, that surely the English quality are scarce of gumpshion. How could it be expected that a young lord, just come to his degree, would condescend to marry the likes of her daughter? But as for Lady Errington insisting upon it, that does not bamboozle me; because it is well known that naturalty is at a dearth among the upper orders in other countries as well as England.”

“It is, to be sure, very like a plot,” replied our friend the spinster, “and passes the power of my comprehension. But what says the master?”

“He is in as great a wonderment as I am,

for he cannot conceive what should have moved my sister, after so many years of silence, to trouble us with such clishmaclavers, writing so much and to so little purpose."

"I wish," rejoined Miss Sibby, "that our young Laird saw this epistle, for he has a talent at deciphering learning, and no doubt would be able to make out the meaning of these dark sentences—for dark they surely are—though I see clearly that they concern a stratagem; for if your sister did not consider the matter of consequence, she would not have put pen to paper about it at this time; and if there were not some jookery at the bottom, she would not have left the affair so much in the mist."

"Deed, Miss Ruart, you are quite right, and have the insight of a discerning spirit; but as neither me nor the master can make heads or tails of this lumbie,* as I may call the letter, ye may take it with you to the Gowans, and ask the Laird when he has con-

* A smooth halfpenny, on which the mintage cannot be discovered.

sidered it, what he thinks it portends; for we must respond next week, and it's very hard to answer a letter that nobody understands."

At this juncture there was a pause in the fluttering wings of the wind, and the sun shone out with enticing brightness from between the scattering wrack, that was still hurrying over the firmament, which Miss Sibby observing, hastily put the letter into her bosom, and said she would take advantage of the interval between the showers, and return at once to the Gowans, and she did so accordingly.

Before she reached the door, however, the skies were again overcast, and another squall was seen mustering the rain on the hills. She also observed the Laird at a distance, coming home, for the day was unpropitious to his sport; a circumstance which gave her special pleasure, as she was possessed of the means of entertaining him, and foresaw, from the boisterous and unsettled character of the weather, that it was not likely they would be broken in upon by visitors. She therefore hastened up into her own room, doffed her gad-about garments, and having put on dry shoes, lest those

she had worn were damp, she was in the parlour, and at the fireside, before he had deposited his gun on the pegs in the lobby.

“’Deed, Mr. Ralston,” said she, as he entered the room, “ye have done well to come home; for this is not a day to be far afield; and I’m sure the partridges have more sense than to quit their nests to be shot at in such weather; and moreover, I’m glad to see you, for do you know that Mrs. Palmer’s letter is a most constipated communication—neither the master, nor her, nor me could make more of it than if we had eaten it like the roll of Ezekiel, which it greatly resembles, being full of lamentations, and mourning, and woe. But change your feet first, and when you have gotten dry stockings, and your slippers, which I see ye are not out the need of, we must hold a shandrim on this perplexity.”

“Has Mrs. Palmer’s letter, then,” said the Laird, “any thing to do with mine?”

“To be sure it has; and I have brought it with me: but it’s no’ discreet to sit down with damp clothes. So go shift yourself, and then we’ll riddle the ins and outs o’ t. Surely

that Lady Errington must be a thoughtless woman to put herself in the power of two pampered menials, as English servants are justly called in the newspapers; for unless she had done so, they would never have dared to hold up their snouts to the young Lord her son in a manner so audacious and upsetting. It's my opinion that she has been playing some plasket, and that Mrs. Palmer's sister and her gude man, are conjunct colleagues with her: but howsomever, we'll see—and ye'll see as plainly as I do, that what with your letter, and what with this letter, there is some commodity of secrecy among them."

"I doubt, Miss Sibby," said the Laird, turning round to retire, "your imagination's clucking on a cuckoo's egg: but however, I shall be back presently, and the topic is as good as any other, for in-door pastime on such a blustering day."

CHAPTER VI.

WHILE conjecture and ingenuity were busy in the country, events were advancing in town. Franks received on the same day a letter from Lord Errington, which did not tend to allay his curiosity; but in order that the courteous reader may sympathise more intimately with his feelings on the occasion, than I could possibly enable him to do by any description of mine, it will be as well to let the letter speak for itself.

Errington Castle.

“MY DEAR FRANKS,

“Since I left you last week my situation has become more intolerable, and I have in consequence resolved to go abroad for some time. The strange antipathy of my mother seems to

increase; surely it is the very offspring of caprice; the other day she told me, in the most abrupt and intemperate manner, that she did not intend to remove from Errington Castle, and that she had a better right to remain there with my sisters than I had—What could she mean by saying better? It is true, I never was a favourite: I remember, that once, when a mere child, I happened to be alone with her Ladyship in a summer-house which overlooks the river near the castle, and that she suddenly looked wildly at me, and grasped me for a moment furiously, as if she would have thrown me into the stream, uttering some inexplicable expressions of aversion; but my father appearing in sight, she instantly changed her demeanour, and caressed me with a fondness that I never experienced from her before nor since. The incident has left an indelible impression, but if it could have been forgotten, it would now be renewed, for I have within these few days observed her when unnoticed darting the same fiery and intense glance of detestation—the word is not too strong!

“In the midst of these vexations I am great-

ly puzzled. Since that day on which Howard so impertinently advised me on the subject of his daughter, I have ever treated him as his insolence deserved ; but it would seem that he little regards it : safe in the confidence of my mother, he still undauntedly dares to act with self-sufficient familiarity ; I would give half my property to be rid of him. But Lady Errington, without assigning any other reason than her will, insists that wherever she is these Howards shall be. I would rather think her infatuated, than admit the hateful idea and apprehension which the behaviour of his boldness inspires, and which her submission to him awakens ; and yet, except in his freedom, and in the ascendancy which he exercises over her, he is an honest man ; the Howards are indeed worthy people, and in all their services most meritorious. In short, Franks, I am miserable, I know not wherefore, and I see no other chance of mitigating the afflictions which beset me, but by going abroad as early as possible, and trusting to time and chance for relief.

“ Yours,

“ ERRINGTON.”

Without waiting for any reply to his first letter, Mr. Franks, on receiving this, wrote again to Ralston, with the substance of his Lordship's communication ; adding, as a comment, that although he had not before felt any particular interest in Errington's situation, which he began to think fanciful and exaggerated, he was entangled with his Lordship's perplexities, and pitied his anxieties.

" I met," said he, " the other day with Major Humphries, and an elderly gentleman, who knew something of the Erringtons, and who spoke of them rather slightly, as having been a family remarkable in their circle for aristocratic imbecility. The old Lord was particularly so, and the lady for some time before the birth of the present, was regarded among her friends as tainted with insanity. But when I observed to him that she was not of the blood, and that the young Lord her son was deemed superior at college in talent to many of his contemporaries, he was taken quite aback, and with the wonted sagacity of the world, shook his head and said it was a strange affair. Strange certainly it is, Ralston, but why

should it so interest me, and wherefore am I thus impelled to make you a party to the business?"

This wonder was soon increased ; for, in the course of a few days, Franks received an answer to his first letter from the young Laird, very different, indeed, from any thing he had expected from that quarter.

The Gowans.

" Your letter, my dear Franks, would, perhaps, not have excited any particular attention,—although what you say of Lord Errington is so interesting, as to be almost mysterious—had not a worthy lady of the elderly stamp, a relation, who superintends this domicile, happened to find that there was a letter by the same post, franked by his Lordship, to your old dame. In consequence of what you had said, which I read to Miss Ruart, off, in defiance of wind and weather, she went to Mrs. Palmy ; and sure enough the letter from her sister, who has long superintended the Dowager's establishment for her daughters, was to the same tune as your own. But what will even more than

this excite your imaginative temperament, my inquisitive kinswoman is convinced that some secret is the main-spring of Lord Errington's unhappiness; and though she does not exactly say so, I can perceive that she thinks naughtily of my Lady and of Howard: but literary waiting gentlewomen are not the most intelligent correspondents; and there is, without question, something more in the epistle to Mrs. Palmer, than our rustic simplicity can comprehend: for although Miss Ruart has in the way of her sex run foul of a very possible probability, still, it will not account for all you have described. And the insolence of Howard in presuming to advise his young Lord to marry his daughter, is one of the most astounding instances of servile audacity I ever heard of. I think you advised his Lordship wisely, in telling him to get rid of the Howards. It quite amazes me, that a spirited, able fellow, such as Stanley Buxton was at Oxford, should submit to be lectured by a scoundrel, and on such a subject too. But let me hear from you soon again, with more of what may have come to pass; for, as Miss

Ruart judiciously says, 'A letter with such important intelligence as your last contained, was well worth the postage, especially in wet weather.'

"Yours,

ALEXANDER RALSTON."

About the same time that Mr. Franks received this, Mrs. Howard also got a letter in reply, from her sister, Mrs. Palmer, which she read to her husband; but with what feelings we shall not attempt to tell, having neither endowment nor skill to discover what passes in the bosoms of persons in their circumstances, especially at such a time. It was brief as might be expected from a lady who, though the moiety of a schoolmaster, was not literate; and was as follows.

"Greenknowes Academy.

"DEAR MARTHA,

"WE are both blithe to hear about you, and how the old Lord departed away to Abraham's bosom, the weich will one day be the lot of awl; as well as that your child is

VOL. I.

D

like one of my lady's own lignumvity dochters, which should make you and Mr. Howard most attentive to her in her season of distress.

“ The accounts of the young lord are of a dejecting nator ; but that should be laid to heart with a blessing, for with such an income he cannot prove always condumacious, and you, no doubt, God willing, will reap the advantages of a judeeshous compliance with his vagaries, for they are the common infirmities of young men, specially Lords.

“ We have gotten the young Laird of the Gowans to become a residenter in the parish, and he is an easy sosh neighbour, but old Miss Ruart, whom ye will recollect, Miss Sibby that was, and is, and ever will be, or I am no judge of matrimonicals, keeps his hoss, with a curiosity to look into the most private concerns, that is past ordinar. Howsomever, she's of a neebourly turn, and when the Laird kills any game, as he did last Saturday, sends us now and then a pair, which is friendly.

“ The master has just now sixteen, from different foreign parts, besides Bobbie Milligan. He's the only son his father has, and his mo-

ther is no more, the which certifies that the world is not worse with us than in times past, when you were more dutiful in correspondence to your

“ Loving Sister,

“ BAB. PALMER.”

CHAPTER VII.

“THE life of man,” said Franks sedately to himself, when he had read Ralston’s letter, holding it still in his hand,—“the life of man is more of a drama than we are willing to allow, although every thing, in the course of experience, proves the fact. It is inexplicable that while we admit the idea of living in the world without a Providence to be the blackest and most disconsolate which can enter the human mind, and that the proof of being under superintendence is evident in that dramatic arrangement, we should yet shrink at the sentiment of its existence, and be so averse to believe in it as to make no scruple of laughing at those who do. Here now is clear evidence that the innocent fault in the fortunes of Lord Errington

comes not of any blame in his own conduct, and that from whatever source it may arise, these good folks, of Greenknowes, constitute the *dramatis personæ* in the tragedy or comedy of his life, by whom the catastrophe is to be brought about."

This was, however, a hasty conclusion, but it was in unison with his habitual way of thinking; for, although destined by his father to be his successor in a lucrative continental business, which had been so long followed in their family, from father to son, as to be deemed in some degree hereditary, still his heart did not much lie towards commerce of any kind, and his mind was not of a practical character. His companions considered him as something of an ingenious theorist, but he had talent and honourable principles, and, where his feelings were not involved, he was capable of judging correctly, and sometimes even more wisely than many who had the reputation of greater discernment.

In the situation of Lord Errington he became seriously interested: men of more worldly experience would have regarded it as not extraordinary, but as one of those common domestic

predicaments in which old servants exercise their accustomed privileges, and a lady of rank indulged her wilfulness a little more capriciously than accorded with the comfort of those she would influence. It was, however, certain, in his opinion, that it possessed some point of peculiar interest to awaken such curiosity as it had done at Greenknowes.

This notion took possession of his imagination, and for several days he could think of nothing which excited him so much. At last it grew to the importance of an impulse, and he resolved to pay a visit to Errington Castle, conceiving that possibly he might be of some use to his friend were he to investigate, with his own eyes, the actual circumstances in which his Lordship was placed; but the day before he was ready to leave town he received the following note.

“ *Errington Castle.*

“ MY DEAR FRANKS,

“ I BESEECH you come to me with all possible speed. This mystery in which I am involved can be endured no longer. Lady Errington grows every day more intolerable;

poor Mrs. Howard is in misery: as often as she finds me alone she snatches my hand and bursts into tears. Something evidently preys on her mind, and her husband governs the household with an arrogance as amazing to all the servants as to their master. Come, I entreat you, and help me to read this riddle. I would not live the life I lead for thrice my Lordship; and yet I cannot describe in what my wretchedness consists, for it is the incessant occurrence of petty vexations, each totally unworthy of manly consideration, but taken collectively, absolute torment. It is the Dutch torture of the ever-dropping water. Pray do come.

“Yours,

“ERRINGTON.”

In the state of Mr. Franks' feeling such a request was imperative, and on the evening of the same day on which he received it he set out for Errington Castle.

The journey was about ninety miles from London, and he intended to complete all but the last stage in the course of the night, that

he might arrive at the castle next morning to breakfast. He had never been there before, nor did he know the sort of inn where he proposed to sleep ; but such was the tenor of his thick-coming fancies, that nothing meaner than the perplexity of his noble friend crossed his imagination.

He thought only of the cause which could have produced such declared unhappiness ; and it several times occurred to him that surely Errington magnified the incidents to which he attached so much importance ; at others he persuaded himself that there was some secret which Lady Errington and the Howards were equally interested in concealing. What can it be ? he repeated to himself twenty times, and, as the chaise drove along, the idea became firmer rooted.

He then projected many plans to suggest for the discovery of this secret, but ever and anon he roused himself from the reveries into which the thought was leading him, and advised himself, as it were, to take care that he was not yielding to groundless notions, for all that the

case probably required was only a little firmness on the part of his Lordship.

“It is odd, indeed,” said he, “that this much ado about nothing, as I trust it will prove to be in the end, should so molest a man like Errington. It seems to invalid his very faculties: formerly he was slow but decisive. Surely it cannot be reverence for his unnatural mother that deters him from acting with vigour. His irresolution is unaccountable; but the family have been remarkable for that defect, and this may be only the hereditary infirmity beginning to manifest itself in him. The germs of disease often lurk long in the blood, even from the birth, and do not show themselves till late in life: perhaps the same law applies to the mind. But in what way could he act otherwise than he does? There is no circumstance in his case sufficiently striking and obvious to require more than a denial to the feminine folly of Lady Errington in seeking with such avidity the advancement of her minion. But the insolence of Howard, the father of the girl, and the suppressed grief of his wife? Errington has only

to banish the former from his household, and mitigate, in the best manner he can, the misfortune to the latter. I shall see this done before leaving the castle."

The reflections of Franks flowed for a considerable space of time in this channel, until he had worked himself into a belief that there was really nothing so serious in the affair as to require more than the exercise of that just authority with which his friend was invested; and, having made up his mind to this point, he laid his head in the corner of the carriage, and prepared himself to sleep. Sleep, however, would not come;—his fancy, ever lively, had found, in the associations connected with his journey, inexhaustible topics, and although chiefly of such stuff as dreams are made of, still there was a question in them that could not be answered, and which, the more he considered, seemed the less susceptible of explanation.

"There is a secret," he exclaimed aloud, "and until we can fathom it, all conjecture is in vain. But why am I so curiously animated in this business? Lord Errington has many other friends. Why has he made me his confidant?"

What have I to do with his family mysteries? I am vexing myself with a thriftless task by taking so much interest in them. He came out of his course when he came to me; but if the matter be a thing of destiny, I must perform my allotted part; and that it is so, may not be doubted, since even the bare consideration of the possibilities into which it draws my thoughts engrosses all my attention; plague on't, I wish I could sleep. It will be a troublesome affair: no victim was ever so sucked into a vortex as I have been; but it is my own fault. I must, in listening at first to Errington's tale, have inadvertently, by my insatiable curiosity, given him reason to think that he had found in me a sympathising friend. Who could have imagined that a fantastical dowager and an impudent varlet, for neither of whom do I care two straws, were to have such an effect on me? But there is fatality in it, and I must abide the upshot."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE inn where Mr. Franks intended to sleep, was called the Ship and Prophet. The sign represented a Roman galley, with a man weltering among the waves, and a cod-fish coming towards him with its mouth open ; galley, billows, Jonah and the whale were each of equal size, and the composition was the chef-d'œuvre of a wheelwright in the neighbouring village, who, in addition to his own profession, exercised the occasional calling of plumber and glazier, and was besides an amateur in the art of Raffaele and St. Luke.

The day was breaking as the post-chaise with our traveller reached the door, and when he looked out at the window, he saw that the

house promised but sorry accommodation for the purpose which had induced him to think of stopping there; for, although "licensed to let post horses and neat chaises" was inscribed on the sign, it was evidently a place of no great resort, and bore the aspect, rather of a private dwelling, than a traveller's home. It stood on a common, and was so remote from the village where the inn was much better, that it was little frequented. Franks, however, had no other alternative but to alight; and, after a plentiful application of the butt end of the post-boy's whip to the door, he was at last admitted and shown into an up-stair parlour, adjoining to which was a chamber more comfortable than he had hoped to obtain.

The bed in it was curtained with white dimity, a jug of flowers and evergreens stood in front of an oval swing dressing-glass, that adorned the head of a chest of drawers, and the walls were decorated with four pictures in black frames, representing as many ladies of different ages, who by their names were palpably intended for the Seasons. Mr. Franks, however,

did not spend much time in ascertaining their respective beauties, but was speedily in the arms of Morpheus.

As all the accommodation which the house afforded to the way-faring, consisted of these two rooms, the inhabitant of the couch in the inner apartment was liable to be disturbed by guests in the outer, and made an eaves-dropper without choice. For the partition between was a wainscot so thin as not to prevent conversation in either room from being overheard. It thus happened that Mr. Franks had scarcely slept an hour, when he was awakened by the voices of strangers in the parlour, and soon discovered that they had come from Errington Castle to be taken up by a passing stage coach, for London.

The style of their language apprised him that they were of the rank of servants, and as their discourse gradually, from less to more, related to the condition of the family, he became, unconscious to himself, an eager listener. It was not until after the coach had come to the door, and taken them away, that he felt offended at himself for being betrayed by his

curiosity, into the commission of so much impropriety.

They spoke openly of the airs Howard had assumed, and one of them remarked that "during the time of the old Lord he was a very different person; in so much," said he, "that I always thought he had a frightened and a guilty look, and he was in such a terrification and alarm whenever his Lordship spoke to my Lady pettishly, as you know he often did of Howard's child, to whom he thought her more partial than to their own son. But now the fellow grows as proud as a lion, and plainly reckons on the match, which my Lady has so set her heart upon."

"And I don't doubt," replied the other, "it will be brought about, for they were born in the course of the same night, and were it not for Mr. Pomfret Buxton, whom, Jack his groom told me, is resolved to have her, I don't see what should prevent it, for Mariar is certainly as beautiful a creature as I ever seed, and is more cleverer than either Lady Julia or Lady Agnes."

"Well, I can't conceit that, for my Lord's

taste does not incline to her at all, and I heard him tell her Ladyship, his mother, so sharply you can't think, only yesterday, that he was astounded that her own pride was not against such a match, even were he ever so much inclined to it."

"What said she to that?"

"Why, she started up in a storm, and told him that the girl was as good as himself any day, and that if he persisted in his obstinacy, perhaps she would make him repent it; which I thought strange words, especially as you know my Lady is so particular concerning pedigrees, her grandfather being a duke, and she herself the daughter of an Earl. But no doubt she has her reasons, and I knows 'em."

Mr. Franks pricked up his ears at this, and raising himself on his arm, listened with more intense attention.

"What do you know?" rejoined the other servant.

"I knows that she has made Miss Mariar what is Howard's daughter, dependent on her, and as she has had so many dull years in the Castle, she thinks were Miss made Lady Er-

rington, gay times would come again, therefore, she wishes for the marriage that she may rule the Castle as she likes, which she was not allowed to do in old Master's time."

That 's not so clear," said the other, "for, as it was all of her own seeking that the Castle grew so malegrobolous, I doesn't see how what you say can be judicious; I have heard old James tell, who was in the Castle when my Lord was born, that since that very night, my Lady has been ever a saddening, and now he thinks she is grown unreasonable crazy altogether."

At this juncture the London coach drove up to the door, the servants went away, and Mr. Franks threw himself back on his pillow—in which position he lay some time: at last, his sleepy inclination being entirely gone, he rose and began to dress himself, cogitating on what he had so accidentally overheard.

"These sort of fellows," thought he, "sometimes make shrewd guesses respecting the motives of their superiors. It seems not an improbable supposition that Lady Errington may have a selfish object in view in being so

pertinacious about this match. She doubtless sees in the dispositions of her protégée the means by which she may retain her authority, and knows very well that she could not hope to do so, were her son married to a stranger. But what authority? a long period has elapsed since she sequestered herself from the world! What object can she propose to accomplish by resuming her gaiety so late in life?—No: the man's opinion is but a silly conjecture. She is not actuated by any such idle vanity. Her implied menace to Errington, if he persisted in obstinately shunning the match, touches the secret more nearly. She has evidently something in her power by which she can injure him. But in what way can she injure him, or would do so in spite? Is he not her own son? She has, to be sure, a large jointure, and her own fortune was all settled on herself, as a love-token, for her Lord was an old man when he married her. Being late of coming to the title, and ambitious to transmit it in his own line, he married only for heirs—so I have often heard, and certainly by having alike her savings and her fortune at

her own disposal, she has it in her power to reward or disappoint her son. He is, however, not sordid, and it cannot be regarded as of much consequence to one not of expensive habits, and in the receipt of thirty thousand a year."

With his mind working in this way, Mr. Franks entered the post-chaise, and was driven off to the Castle.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN Mr. Franks reached Errington Castle none of the family had left their apartments, but, on sending his name to Lord Errington, he was immediately admitted to his Lordship's dressing-room, where his reception was animated and cordial.

"You cannot imagine, Franks," said his Lordship, "how much you have obliged me by so promptly complying with my entreaty. Things grow worse and worse, and I have determined to quit this house, unless with your assistance I shall be able to appease the evils which beset me. Her Ladyship seems to be actually goaded by a malignant spirit of revenge against me. She never was a kind mother, but now, hatred is not a term strong

enough to describe her impassioned aversion. Some change, however, has taken place in the Howards. They are frightened at my mother's violence."

Having passed some time in discourse of this kind, the friends descended to the breakfast room, where they found the young ladies assembled. It was evident to Mr. Franks, by a visible embarrassment in their air, particularly in that of Miss Maria, as Howard's daughter was commonly called, that the discord had its influence on them; and the restraint in which they held themselves appeared to increase, when in the course of conversation they understood that Mr. Franks was a college acquaintance of his Lordship, and possessed his confidence. Lady Errington being informed that a stranger guest was in the Castle, did not make her appearance.

Breakfast on the part of the gentlemen was hastily dispatched, and they walked into the park together to consult on how they should proceed.

"My first object," said Mr. Franks, "is to get you released from the Howards. It is not

to be endured, however faithful their services, that any servants should presume to act as this man does. Give me leave, and I will bear to him your orders on the subject."

This point being determined, no time was lost in carrying it into effect, but, as the interview between Mr. Franks and Howard was described in a letter which he wrote the same evening to the Laird, it will be as well to quote his account of it.

"Errington Castle.

"DEAR RALSTON,

"YOU will not be surprised to learn that I am at this place, up to the ears in Errington's troubles. His situation is the vilest thralldom imaginable, and although we are both convinced that there is some mysterious understanding between his mother and the Howards, particularly the man, all our conjectures run to fault when we try to discover their mutual secret.

"Agreeably to a wise resolution, he authorized me to convey his determination, formed with reluctance, to dismiss Howard, a person

who has been so long an inmate of the Castle as almost to have acquired an adherence to it as a property, and whom his Lordship regards as possessed of no ordinary worth ; accordingly, I sent for the man and made the communication, telling him at the same time that his master imputed to him no other blame than that of forgetting his station, and presuming to interfere in a family difference.

“ He listened to all I had to say respectfully, and once or twice was a little affected at the idea of being, after so many years of faithful servitude, dismissed ; admitting that the manner in which I had communicated his Lordship’s decision, showed at once the presumption of which he had been guilty, and the regard that was previously entertained for him. ‘ But,’ said he, ‘ my only motive was to secure my Lord’s happiness.’

“ ‘ That may be, Howard,’ was my answer, ‘ but it was more obviously that you had a stronger motive. Your object was to promote the advancement of your own daughter.’

“ ‘ It may seem so to you, Sir,’ was his reply, ‘ but I know my own heart, and I was

actuated by no other feelings than those of affection for his Lordship.'

" 'You are a man of sense, Howard, and must have observed that your master has no particular regard for your daughter, whom Lady Errington may have perhaps injured by her partiality.'

" 'Her Ladyship knows very well what she is about,' was his answer, expressed I thought with a disagreeable inflection of voice. It struck me at the moment, and has since continued in my memory, as well as his image with the air of indifference in which it was uttered; I replied, however.

" 'Doubtless the favour which her Ladyship has continually shown to your child is gratifying to you, but his Lordship has long experienced that it has been indulged at his cost. He has never found her Ladyship but as a stepmother.'

" 'The blood rushed into the face of Howard, and his self-possession for a moment fled.

" 'If we have done wrong,' said he, 'it could be no crime, for it was to serve our own child.' And then he added with more composure,

‘We have been so accustomed to see Miss Maria treated as one of the family from her infancy, that perhaps my wife and I have ceased to consider her as our daughter.’

“I know not what it was that made me look at him somewhat sternly as he said this, but he again became confused, and I put an end to the interview by saying,

“‘It is not in my power, Howard, to bear any extenuation of your fault to his Lordship. Get ready to quit the Castle without delay, and evince, by your alacrity in this, that you are still not unworthy of the estimation in which Lord Errington desires to consider you. Be assured, that although he feels you have taken too much upon you, he will not withdraw his patronage.’

“‘Patronage!’ exclaimed the poor man with evident sensibility, ‘he knows not what he owes to me.’

“‘What can he owe?’ said I, startled by his remark, ‘more than those services which he cheerfully acknowledges, and I am sure will generously reward?’

“‘Reward!’ cried Howard with increasing

emotion, 'And he turns me out of doors! I but before suspected myself of having done amiss, and this confirms it;' and he wrung his hands in agitation, adding, 'Tell my Lord he shall be obeyed; to-morrow I will remove Mrs. Howard from the Castle,' and with these words he bowed and left the room, with a look of dejection becoming the misfortune which had overtaken him while indulging his ambitious dream.

"In relating the particulars of this singular interview, it seems as if in executing Lord Errington's request to treat Howard as a person whom he had long esteemed, I had exceeded my commission by the compassion I felt for him, and that his manner in several instances would have justified me in being more austere. However, the task as concerns him is finished, but still no light has been thrown upon the manifest enigma of his conduct; and I feel that he has whetted my curiosity by saying that Lord Errington knows not what he owes to him, while the grieved manner in which he said, 'And he turns me out of doors!' betokened a degree of heartfelt

anguish altogether inconceivable as connected with his circumstances. Had it breathed the chagrin of disappointment, I should not have been surprised; but it was uttered with a sadness so like the accent of humiliation and contrition, that it has infected me with the most improbable fancies.

"I have not yet seen her Ladyship, but she intends to make her appearance at dinner; by that time she will have heard of Howard's dismissal, and will have guessed, by the manner of it, something concerning the nature of my business here.

"Yours ever,

"H. FRANKS."

This letter old Nanse Gather, the postess of Greenknowes, delivered to Miss Sibby herself, observing, that it was curious she had also another London letter again, and at the same time, for Mrs. Palmer, but it was not franked like the former.

"The which has made me, Miss Sibby, ever since I got it from the office, marvel what such inditing can be about. It must be a parti-

cular business that could not afford time to get a frank ; for I have a notion when letters are franked to householdry leddies, they cannot be on life and death affairs, but something that will keep till the morn, and no' be spoilt even the next day."

CHAPTER X.

IT is not universally true that postage is the only tax paid without a grudge, for not only did Miss Sibby consider it a grievance, but Mrs. Palmer deemed it a most extortionate thing to be at any expense for letters at all, unless they related to the boarders, into whose accounts the postage could be charged by "the Master." The reception, in consequence, which Nanse Gather met with when she went to the academy-house was not of the most urbane description.

It happened that Mrs. Palmer was making tea to the Dominie when the maid brought in the epistle, which the lady took from her without looking at, and stretching her hand to the mantel-shelf, where several penny-pieces were

lying, gave her one, presuming that the letter was franked when she heard it was from London, her sister being the only person who was likely to address her from that quarter. The penny was the special fee of Nanse, to which all letters franked or paid were liable; but when the handmaid delivered the penny, Nanse, putting her head in at the door, said,

“Ye see, Mistress Palmer, that it’s no a Parliamenter, and I must have the shilling over and above.”

“A shilling!” cried the lady, lifting the letter and looking at it. “Does the King’s Government think that poor people are made of money? What could tempt my sister to cause me to be at such an outlay? I have a great mind no’ to take up her nonsense.”

The Dominie himself, a sagacious carl, here interposed, and giving the maid a shilling for Nanse, said, as the parlour-door was shut, “In these times, my dear, it does not become us, in our station of life, and having the character of the academy to maintain for sound Government principles, to object to the King’s taxes. If it travelled afield that we were averse

to taxation, it might be thought that there was something not clean in my politics, and who knows what the consequence might be among the parents of our boarders? But what says Mrs. Howard? and how has it come to pass that she had such an instancy in her news that she could not 'bide for a frank?"

"This is news, indeed," replied Mrs. Palmer, giving him the open letter; "read it yourself."

The master brought from his waistcoat-pocket his spectacles, and having wiped the glasses with the corner of his handkerchief, he placed them on that feature which, according to the philosophy of Dr. Pangloss, was created on purpose to wear them, and read aloud, in continuous monotony, without pause or hesitation, as follows.

"Barrington Castle.

"MY DEAR SISTER,

"THIS comes to let you know a very extraordinary thing. We are going to leave the Castle, because Mr. Franks, whom you well know, he having been under your own wing, has been brought here, and has egged my Lord to part with Howard, for no other reason than advising him to marry Miss Maria, which he

had a good right to do, and had it not been so, we would have accounted it a great misfortune to have left this most delightful place. However, all is for the best; we have surrendered at discretion, and it is not our intention to go again into servitude; so be none surprised if you see us at Greenknowes in the spring of the year. But the fault is all my Lady's, and owing to my Lord refusing to marry Miss Maria, which is surely a comical thing, for he might be allowed to choose for himself. My Lady is dreadful, however, at the thought of our going away, and would fain insist upon our staying; but we think it will be of more advantage to all if we go as soon as possible out of harm's way, and therefore we begin to pack up our rattle-traps to-morrow, and will be off with the London coach next day. As this is but to account for our quitting the servitude of the Castle, which would surprise you if you heard by accident of it, I have no more at present, but remains, your

“ Loving sister,

“ MARTHA HOWARD.

“ N.B. You may direct to our town house in Berkeley Square, and the porter will take it in.’

"This is indeed an extraordinary thing," said Mr. Palmer, taking off his spectacles, and folding up the letter, "but they must have played their cards to some purpose, since they talk of retiring from business,—a blessing we have long and far to look to."

"I wonder," replied his wife, "how Harry Franks came to have a finger in the pie. As for the Lady, she is, by all accounts, no better than by herself, being so infatuated about this match. When they go, she will, no doubt, keep their daughter, and as she has laid her snares in the water, she may yet catch what she has been so long fishing for. But they are a congregation of unrighteous ones altogether; for you see how lightly my sister speaks of the match, as if it would not be a great thing to see her daughter a lady of degree. There are, however, marvellous things among the nobles, and I have read myself in a history-book how a Countess persecuted her son, and made a savage of him."

While thus discussing in this desultory and domestic manner the important information contained in the letter, Miss Sibby made her appear-

ance. The intelligence which Nanse Gather had communicated of a letter from London for Mrs. Palmer, had instigated her curiosity, inso-much that when the young Laird made her acquainted with the substance of the news he had received, she became fidgety, and could not rest without making some endeavour to ascertain the particular business to which it related, none doubting that it was to the same effect.

Why this investigating spinster became so earnestly actuated to learn the truth, as she called it, of an affair with which she had no possible connexion, belongs not to our task to determine ; perhaps she was only obeying that law of our common nature by which we are so often incited to busy ourselves in the concerns of others. Be that, however, as it may, she diplomatically alleged that she was allured abroad by the soft gentleness of the evening, and had turned her sauntering steps towards the village, as she had no enjoyment in the solitary, sentimental promenade of rural and romantic Misses.

“ 'Deed, Mrs. Palmer,” said she, “ it does

not become women arrived at years of discretion to be seen gallanting by themselves on the road sides ; for my part, an unbidden dish of tea and talk with a neighbour is a cordiality that's very relishing ; so seeing how all day the weather was correct and fine, I was minded to come in my easy way to you, but I was detained by the Laird, who has had a letter that's not much to the purpose, but it speaks of your sister, and I was fain to hear all about it, that I might tell you. But no doubt ye are well-acquainted with the whole tot of the business, and how she and her gude man have got warning."

"It's of their own free will," replied Mrs. Palmer, a little testily, "and ye'll be surprised to hear that they have made a sufficiency, and have no intention of any more servitude."

"Ay!" cried Miss Sibby, "they'll be going to take up an inns, which, I comprehend, is the upshot of English servants when they have laid a nest-egg."

"They intend to pay us a visit in the spring," said the Dominie's lady, with an emphasis and

elevation of the head that bespoke consideration subjoining—"It's in the hand of Providence to bring many wonderful things to pass."

"But Mr. Franks says in his epistle to the Laird, it's that which makes my Lord so rampageous at your gude brother; for although their daughter is in the main a fine creature, it cannot be supposed that there is the power of a comparison between their condition."

"When Adam delved and Eve span,
Where was then the gentleman?"

said the Master, as it were in soliloquy, while studiously listening to the gradations with which the two ladies were sliding unconsciously into the subject of the letters.

CHAPTER XI.

IN the mean time, Howard and his wife had quietly retired from the Castle ; but the irksome circumstances of Lord Errington received no alleviation, for in the course of the same day Mr. Pomfret Buxton came on a formal visit, with the serious intention of paying his addresses openly to Miss Maria.

This gentleman possessed a small independent fortune, but he had nothing particularly interesting about his character ; his chief importance arose from his relationship to Lord Errington, which, though distant, made him heir at law to the estates and title. He was considerably older than his Lordship, and during the life of the late Baron he had never been a welcome guest at the Castle ; for that

very connexion which ought to have entitled him to superior consideration there, was in the mind of that old jealous peer a cause of justifiable dislike.

Previous to the birth of our hero, his Lordship regarded him as an eager heir longing for his place; and after that event, as the natural enemy of the son that had marred his succession. But still Pomfret Buxton went sometimes to the Castle, and it was during those visits that he had become attached to Maria.

For some time his family pride contended against the attachment; but when he heard how much Lady Errington was in earnest that her own son should marry her, his affection grew more decided, and thus it happened, on being informed that Maria was rejected by his titled kinsman, he resolved to offer her his hand. This intention he communicated to Lord Errington, who referred him to his mother, remarking that it was a subject in which her Ladyship was alone interested, as she had all the authority of the parents. The result, however, will best be described by quoting a letter of Mr. Franks on the occasion.

“ Errington Castle.

“ MY DEAR RALSTON,

“ I am still, you see, in Doubting Castle with Giant Despair. The Howards are gone, but his troubles are none mitigated, for the inexplicable distemper of his mother has assumed a more virulent type.

“ One Mr. Pomfret Buxton, the next heir to Errington, has come a thriving wooer to Miss Maria, and Lady Errington has acceded to his suit with a degree of avidity which confounds us all. Her Ladyship seems, indeed, to be touched with something like wildness in consequence. Every look and expression that can convey contempt and aversion she darts towards her son—what can the passionate and phantastical woman intend by such treatment?

“ This morning, in a flight of insanity, she told Maria that she yet would be Lady Errington; and derisively glancing at my perplexed friend, called Mr. Buxton My Lord.

“ Errington was evidently affected at her unfeeling conduct towards himself, and said,

“ ‘ I almost wish he were so.’

“ My heart was pierced with anguish at the

look and tone with which this was uttered. Her Ladyship turned suddenly round, and having for a moment glared on him with fiend-like energy, burst into a frightful hysterical laugh. And yet this woman in all other respects, save to her son, overflows with amiable qualities. Had he, however, stung her with the most envenomed causes of revenge, she could not obviously hate him more—Hate! it is too weak a term to apply to her unnatural detestation.

“However, I trust when the marriage is over that she will follow her favourite, whom she seems to love so strangely more than all her own children, and that Errington will be indemnified by her absence for the pain he at present endures. I do all in my power to allay the exasperation of his feelings, but had he not been himself blessed with great natural equanimity, his case is one in which no soothing could avail. The only thing I regret to observe is, that he cherishes, if I may dare say so, too much reverence for his mother, simply because she is his mother. To him she is indeed none, and more than challenges his indifference.

“I return to London in the course of the week, accompanied by Errington, who goes to Paris. His intentions towards the innocent bane of his peace are truly generous. To propitiate his mother, he gives her a dowry equal to his sisters; we always thought him clever, but the collisions of feeling to which he has been exposed, have elicited brighter qualities than I had ever before thought he possessed. But why is he the victim of such misery? The utmost which on reflection can be said is, that he is vexed with a mother who is mad a point or two of the compass; no insurmountable affliction surely to a peer of the realm, with thirty thousand a year; and yet he is in sufferance a very Milo: his mother the closing cloven tree, and Howard the wolf at his throat.

“Among the servants I have fallen in with an old man who keeps the lodge at the gate. He has given me some account of Howard. It seems that the old Lord was much attached to him, and that he then deserved his confidence; but from the birth of my friend, whom Howard’s wife nursed, he became an altered man, grew arrogant to his fellow-servants, and carried

his head higher than his Lord's. This, you will say, is but repeating what we already know—True! but his arrogance took often the shape of freedom towards her Ladyship, as if he were her master: the unseemly command, however, betokened no personal familiarity; but she evidently stood in awe of him. 'It was perplexing to observe them sometimes,' said the old man, 'for he held the wires of her motions in a way no servant should, and yet he lacked in no duty to his master.'

"What can you make of this?—I have my own thoughts and fears; doubtless you think, too, as I do. Yet Howard has quitted the Castle like any other servant peacefully dispensed with, and has left his daughter as entirely at the will of Lady Errington as if he had no interest in her destiny. Poor Errington! I wish this mystery were unravelled, or that it had not been his fate to resist Lady Errington's wishes. Yours ever,

"HENRY FRANKS."

When the Laird had read this epistle, he slowly folded it up, and rising without speak-

ing, went to a scrutoire which stood in the corner of the room, and placed it there with the other letters he had received from Mr. Franks, locking the scrutoire over it with something like an emphasis, as much as saying to the letter "Rest in peace."

Miss Sibby Ruart, who was sitting in the room at the time, observed him particularly, but did not venture to speak. She discerned that the contents of the epistle were not at that time deemed fit to be communicated to her, but, certain that sooner or later they would be, she solaced her curiosity with the hope that the period was not distant; and, the better to disguise the disappointment of the moment, remarking, and laying down the patchwork on which her ingenuity was engaged, that it was almost time for tea, she considerably left the room, as the thoughtful young Laird resumed his elbow-chair, and began ruminatingly to poke their evening fire.

CHAPTER XII.

“OCTOBER is now stripping the branches of their leaves; the haws on the hedge glow like embers; the rowns are still brighter on the tree, and Autumn has carried her apron-full of sheaves to the barn. The smoke rises from both chimneys of the Grange, betokening that the green boughs have been taken from the parlour grate, and that winter is expected in the evening: the table is removed from before the door of the ale-house. As the stage-coach passes, the guard is buttoning his great-coat or fencing his throat with a comforter for the night; weary children, with cheeks besmeared with blackberries, make way to the cackling village; the town-bred sportsman, returning to his way-side inn, shows proudly the wing of a

partridge or pigeon sticking out from his pocket, and his dog comes slouchingly at his heels ; the geese, collecting from their pastures on the green or common, churm to each other as they observe the market carts with empty baskets returning from the town, or Goody Gaffer, with her gown over her head, going forth with a porringer in hand to fetch her evening milk, while the cows are yet lowing in the farm-yards ; the bargemen on the canal or river's side have lighted their pipes ; the sexton comes from the churchyard, having tolled the curfew ; the laundress has gathered in nearly all her linen from the shrub and cord ; the cat sits meditating at the cottage-door ; passengers assemble at the ferry ; the patient, unharnessed donkey feeds on the road side ; the labourer talks leisurely to the passing clown ; the groom is cleaned and sweetened for a visit to Cowalip at the dairy ; the village dominie plods forth on his weary walk, and a horse with a pillion is at the midwife's door, but the doctor has come home, and his drug-boy rides his steed to the water. Such are the signs of the time," said Franks, in stoccato sentences,

as the different objects came in view, to Lord Errington, as they travelled together in his Lordship's carriage to London, adding, "Verily there is much poetry in a calm evening; but I would rather at this moment see the substantial prose of a hot dinner, than fare much longer on this *omelette soufflée*."

His Lordship had been for some time seemingly in drowsy rumination, and heeded him not, till he put the suggestion in a new form by saying jocularly, that after travelling nearly eighty miles, he did not think he could hold out to London. Instead, however, of replying to the observation, Lord Errington roused himself, and said with some emotion,

"Do you know, Franks, what I have been thinking?"

"How should I?" answered his companion, "unless it was of dinner—I can think of nothing else."

With something almost like solemnity in his voice, his Lordship rejoined:

"I have had strange fancies; I wonder how such things are created in the imagination?"

Franks, startled by the accent in which

this was said, turned round and looked him earnestly in the face. He had done his best during the journey to keep his Lordship's attention engaged, for he had observed that he was unconsciously disposed to fall now and then into a brown study ; but he was not quite prepared to hear him give utterance to his reveries in a tone of such disquietude. He then threw himself back in the carriage, and, forgetful of the reflections in which he had been indulging, waited in expectation of some further remark, but none followed.

After a short time again spent in silence, his Lordship, without changing his position or moving his eyes from some object which he apparently contemplated in the distant landscape, said,

“ It is natural enough that men should dislike their heirs ; but the feeling with which my father regarded Pomfret Buxton was of a harsher quality than belongs to that jealousy. It has been alleged that he was first prompted by his antipathy against him to think of marrying ; and yet Mr. Buxton was then only a mere boy, who could in no respect have given

him offence. I have been told that, when my eldest sister was born, Errington was so disappointed at a daughter, as to be really in grief; and at the birth of Lady Agnes, some artifice was employed in breaking the news to him; such was his anxiety to have a son, not only to preserve the inheritance in his own line, but to disappoint Buxton, whom he never ceased to consider as an alien to his blood, and, though a worthy man, as derogatory to our race."

To this soliloquy, for it was so abstractedly spoken as to merit the epithet, Mr. Franks made no reply, but he pondered upon what could have been the tenour of his Lordship's reflections to lead to such expressions; and, in consequence, a second pause ensued, which was also broken by another abrupt observation from Lord Errington.

"Howard and his wife," said he, "seem to care as little about their daughter as my mother does about her son. They left the Castle without evincing the slightest regret at parting from her. It vexes me to recollect the innumerable instances of a strange obtuseness of heart which seems common to us all. We

have no right affection for those we ought to have. No one but my nurse, Mrs. Howard, has ever shown me any regard, such as I have imagined was parental feeling; and since my father's death, even she is changed, and looks on me, as if, by coming to the title, I no longer treated her with the kindness I used to do. If I be changed, it comes from a cause that does not concern her."

Mr. Franks, still more perplexed, and unable to perceive to what end these disconsolate reminiscences tended, continued silent, and his Lordship added,

"We! why do I say we?"

"Very true," interposed Mr. Franks, glad to find a chance by which he might turn the current of his thoughts into another channel; "What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba? It surprises me that you should be so much troubled about having parted with these Howards."

"It surprises myself; for the sort of tenderness that I feel for my nurse, has arisen less from her blandishments over my childhood, than from the care and love she has shown to

me since. When the hearts of others were seared, as it were, towards me, I have sometimes thought there was a sentiment of pity in her regard: once, when she saw me unable to please or interest my mother—I was then but a little boy—she lifted me away, and burst into tears upon my neck.”

“ You have a curious remembrance,” said Franks, “ of Lady Errington’s slights of your childhood. Take care, my Lord, that it does not nourish fancies which were better suppressed.”

“ It cannot suggest to me others worse than those with which I am already tainted.”

“ Tainted !”

“ Yes, it is a fit term to describe the unwholesome thoughts that corrupt my heart. I begin also to lose confidence in myself; and yet I would not be justified even to hint the apprehensions which disturb both my sleeping and waking thoughts; guilt could not molest me more; and yet what of guilt or shame has ever sullied me ?”

Franks smiled and said :—

“ Our old college friends used to say, my

Lord, that you had all the soft shyness of juvenile genius, without any of its other accompaniments."

"Perhaps," replied his Lordship, "they said very truly; but the aphorism has more in it than you are aware of, I fear. But the fulness of time, for the developement of the mystery, is at hand."

"Your Lordship speaks like an oracle," exclaimed Mr. Franks, with a degree of ceremony in his manner, different from his constitutional freedom; but the difference indicated increased consideration, and sensible of it himself, he immediately subjoined with characteristic gaiety, to conceal his emotion,

"But dinner, dinner! how impatient is that domineering deity, the stomach, for sublunary things!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE inward dejection of Lord Errington furnished the topic of the next letter which Mr. Franks wrote to Laird Ralston; but as the contents were not in other respects interesting, it is unnecessary to quote it: one little circumstance deserves, however, to be noticed, as it shows how intimately his thoughts were becoming conversant with a subject which he did not venture to disclose.

“He is,” said Franks, “growing every hour more mysterious. He is packing up for a long excursion to the Continent, and he holds himself much aloof from his friends. He accepts no invitations, nor gives any; and it is perfectly manifest that he even makes an effort not to appear strange towards me. Were it not

1870

that we know how humbly the spirit feels in distress, I would say he looks up to me as to a superior in condition. What can be the cause of this? Do tell me what you think of it. I have my own notions, but they are not such as are likely to arise in his mind; and, between ourselves, what very obvious cause has he to be dejected at all, though, perhaps, enough to vex him?"

A few days after the Laird had received this epistle, Miss Sibby Ruart was favoured unexpectedly one Saturday afternoon with a visit from the Dominie and his spouse. "They had come abroad," as Mrs. Palmer said, "beguiled by the beauty of the day, and had sauntered on, step by step, with as little purpose as a knotless thread, till they found themselves at the gate of Gowans, and could not but look in."

The spinster's knowledge of the human heart had taught her that mankind are seldom sincere in voluntary declarations of their motives; and accordingly she was convinced they had some object in view which they felt to be important, though they deemed it expedient to represent themselves as so trivially affected.

Having descanted at some length on the felicity of the season, till Miss Sibby began to doubt the accuracy of her philosophy in conceiving them actuated by a recondite intention, Mrs. Palmer inquired, as it were in a parenthesis, "if the Laird had lately heard again from Harry Franks?"

"That's a question, Mrs. Palmer, that requires a consideration, for he has had a letter about something from London, the which, I may say, was possibly from Mr. Franks; but, without reading it to me, he locked it up as if it had been a hallowed thing of secrecie in the scrutoire there:—no doubt it was from him. But how was your sister when you last heard from her, and how does she put up with the calamity that obligated her and her gudeman to quit my Lord's service?"

"It was a step of their own free will," replied the Dominie's Leddy; "and as they are in a sinecure way that places them above the world, Martha bears her adversity with a Christian spirit. We are in hopes that she will be here on a visit next week by herself; and so, although it cannot be said that she has

been the most attentive of sisters, yet I allow that the prospect of seeing her—now that she is so well on in the world—is not without a satisfaction.”

Miss Sibby, by this speech, was restored to full confidence in the insight she possessed of the human heart ; she could not, however, very clearly yet discern in what respect the coming of Mrs. Howard was interesting either to her or the Laird ; but she added—

“ No doubt, Mrs. Palmer, both to you and ‘ the Master,’ the visitation from your sister will be a comely thing,—and she ’ll be for spending the winter with you ?”

“ That will depend on a circumstance ; for her daughter is to be married shortly to Mr. Pomfret Buxton, who is a great man, and a cousin to my Lord, that may come to the title, which, you see, is almost as grand a thing as if Lord Errington himself had followed his mother’s counsel.”

“ But my Lord himself may marry, and beget sons and daughters,” replied Miss Sibby, “ and where then will be their greatness ?”

“ But surely,” replied Mrs. Palmer, “ it ’s a

fine thing for their daughter to become kith and kin to nobility."

"That's just as the marriage may turn out," replied Miss Sibby, now quite convinced that the object of their visit was to communicate this elevating intelligence; perhaps to mortify her. Half the pleasure enjoyed in good fortune arises from displaying the superiority it confers.

Soon after the conversation fell into common-places, and Miss Sibby became occultly nettled to observe that Mrs. Palmer spoke of the Great as if she were already of their caste. No doubt it is disagreeable enough to witness such frail vanity in our neighbours; it is, indeed, offensive to us all to see or hear of those who are no better than ourselves, attaining any advantage over us in worldly augmentation, either by chance, endeavour, or merit. This sentiment the spinster deeply felt when her visitors had departed.

"Now," said she to herself, ruminating of the anticipated connexion, "the whole parish will be too little to hold the pride of the Palmers if this marriage really reach a come-to-pass.

In her way the mistress is certainly a most respectable person, and the Dominie, leaving him to his quiet condition, is surely a man of parts; but I cannot see how either the one or the other was ordained by Providence to rise to such a degree by reason of their niece; and it bodes no luck to the neighbourhood that they should have been so vogue with the news as to come over an ends errand to molest me."

In this mood of mind Miss Sibby was indulging as she sat solitary at her patchwork, when the Laird returned from the moor, with a brace of grouse and a plover dangling at his belt.

"Ye'll no guess," she exclaimed, as he came into the parlour, "who I have had here this afternoon? No less than Mr. and Mrs. Palmer, brimful of tidings concerning their niece, who is going to be married, not to Lord Errington, but to his cousin; the which will make her a match in consequentiality with any my Lady Madame in the land; for this cousin is by rights of law my Lord's inheritor."

The Laird, who had been prepared by Mr. Franks for these tidings, made no particular

observation, and Miss Sibby noticing his indifference, and at the same time suspecting he had heard of it by the letter she had not seen, subjoined —

“ It ’s very confounding that Mr. Franks has not written about it to you ; and it ’s very extraordinary, after we have been so led to expect that Miss would be left in her own station of life, to hear of this new upshot in the wheel of fortune. But the most marvellous thing of all, as far as I can fathom is, that Mrs. Howard will not be at the wedding, but is coming here next week in a penitential manner to see her sister.

“ Penitential !” cried Ralston, startled by the word ; “ what has been disclosed ? Is the mystery then divulged ?”

“ That something has been, is not to be doubted,” said Miss Sibby, making a dead point at the letter in the scrutoire ; “ for no mention was made of Mrs. Howard’s gudeman, nor where he is, nor what he was doing, which ill-natured folk would say had the look of a separation, at least for a time ; and as for Lady Errington, she knows best, but we in Scotland

are well spared from such doings. The English are surely a real immoral people. What said Mr. Franks when ye heard from him last about it?"

Whether the Laird would have answered the question remains in doubt, as just when he ought to have done so, Nanse Gather was seen from the window coming up the avenue, with her little leathern bag hanging from her arm, and a letter ready in her hand for delivery. Miss Sibby rose and went herself to the door to receive it, rummaging her pocket by the way for change to pay the postage.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE letter exceeded the usual magnitude, and much to Miss Sibby's gratification, was in an official frank, containing, besides a note from Mr. Franks, a long epistle to him from Lord Errington, with two or three documentary papers, of which a description will be duly given. The note, brief and abrupt, was as follows:—

“ London.

“ MY DEAR RALSTON,

“ WHO could have imagined that matters so romantic were ever to constitute the subject of our correspondence? Read the inclosed:—read also the papers to which Errington refers. Poor fellow! I pity him from

the bottom of my heart; but his misfortune admits of no mitigation from me, and I think it better to let him determine for himself, than to disturb him with advice. I shall, therefore, go out of his way for a couple of days to Brighton. When I return to town his agitation will have abated, and then I may be of some use.

Yours,

“HENRY FRANKS.”

The Laird read the note aloud, and Miss Sibby, pushing back from before the fire the claw-foot table on which her needle-work was lying, drew her chair nearer to his, and said, with evident satisfaction—

“Now we shall hear all about it.”

Without making any remark, the Laird laid the cover with its enclosures on the table, and having picked out his Lordship's letter from among the other papers, subjoined, before reading it—

“I did not show you the last I had from Mr. Franks, because it contained some things that suggested conjectures of an odd kind; perhaps this may serve to explain them.”

“ Saturday.

“ The riddle of my life, dear Mr. Franks, is now redde. This morning, while at breakfast, Howard requested an audience. Displeased as I have had occasion to be with him, I hesitated to grant it, and the servant was pausing at the door for my answer, when he came forward himself. I need not describe my astonishment, especially when, on the footman retiring, he sat down. Indeed, my surprise was so excessive, that it deprived me of all presence of mind, and he was the first to break silence.

“ ‘ I have had this morning a letter from Lady Errington,’ said he.

“ ‘ Her Ladyship,’ I replied, with considerable emotion, ‘ does herself honour by the correspondence.’ Without, however, noticing what I said, he added—

“ ‘ And she informs me that Mr. Pomfret Buxton has proposed for Miss Maria.’

“ ‘ I have heard as much,’ was my contemptuous answer ; ‘ but I do not perceive in what manner I am particularly interested in the matter.’

“ ‘ You are !’ said he emphatically, with a

look of indescribable audacity ; and then drawing his chair close to me, and lowering his voice, he whispered, ‘ She is not my daughter !’

“ Had a peal of ordnance burst at my ear, I could not have been more amazed, and yet, my dear friend, a fearful thought has sometimes of late haunted me that it was so, and several times I have fancied, when she scowled, that she bore a striking resemblance to Lady Errington herself. In my consternation I exclaimed—

“ ‘ Is she then Lady Errington’s? Why has this guilty mystery been so long kept up?’

“ He made no direct answer ; on the contrary, he looked confused, as if he would have recalled his words ; and he then imperfectly related, that the late Lord, whom he called my father, was so impatient for a male heir to his estates and title, that he embittered the life of Lady Errington.

“ Recollecting how I had often heard that Maria and I were born in the same night, I inquired, with a feeling which cannot be described, ‘ Am I then your son?’

“ His colour instantly fell ; his complexion became of a cadaverous yellow hue, and his

whole appearance agitated from some uncontrollable agitation. I repeated the question with energy. He still made no reply, but looked anxiously and fearfully around—and I again with sternness exclaimed—

“ ‘ Good Heavens ! am I your son ?—answer me at once. Let there be no more equivocation.’ ”

“ The manner in which this was expressed restored his self-possession ; the natural hue returned into his cheek, and looking at me steadily for nearly the space of a minute, he said solemnly—

“ ‘ You are not Lord Errington,’ and suddenly burst into tears.

“ ‘ What have you done ? what have you uttered ? Confession will not save the conspirators.’ ”

“ ‘ I dread my danger,’ he added, somewhat calmer ; ‘ but none who know the secret will betray.’ ”

“ ‘ Does not Lady Errington ?’ ”

“ ‘ It was her own contrivance. The blame with her is greatest.’ ”

“ ‘ Does not your wife know ?’ ”

“ ‘ She was your nurse. She loves you well, and affection has sealed her lips.’

“ ‘ But I know it.’

“ ‘ He glared at me with a wild and ghastly astonishment, and then, with something like a tone of admonition, said sedately,

“ ‘ Your own interest, my Lord. Reflect on the consequences.’

“ ‘ Who am I? what am I? Do I not dream?’ was all the answer I could return.

“ ‘ If you consider this matter wisely,’ said he, after a considerable pause, ‘ things may never be disturbed. You have but to make a provision for me and my wife, that we may not be looked down upon by Mr. Pomfret Buxton and his Lady.’

“ ‘ Why,—for what should I do this?’

“ ‘ For his title and estates. They are his of right, but as he does not know that, where is the harm to him?’

“ ‘ Who then am I? instantly answer.’

“ ‘ I have said—not the Lord Errington.’

“ ‘ Are you my father?’

“ ‘ He was again smitten with something like a strange terror at the question, and rising

from his seat panting, as if emerging from under water, cried,

“ ‘ I have said too much.’

“ ‘ Give me an answer ?’ was my impassioned exclamation, and starting from my chair, I added, ‘ Speak, or I shall instantly alarm the house, and order you into custody.’

“ ‘ Were you my son, durst you say that to me ?’

“ On the instant I snatched the bell-pull, but he fiercely grasped my arm, and prevented me from ringing, while with a firm, collected, and indignant voice, he said,

“ ‘ Are you mad ? all you possess in the world is at hazard.’

“ ‘ Not all,’ was my calm reply, letting the rope swing from my hand. ‘ My integrity is not at stake,’ and I walked, scarcely conscious of my action, to the other end of the room. He remained where he was, and then addressed me :

“ ‘ Come, come, my Lord, this is not Bedlam ; we are here on business. Listen to me. Be more a man, or say when you will be.’

“ I could make no reply, and being at the

moment near the door, I instantly quitted the library, where this scene took place, and running to my own dressing-room, instantly locked myself in, as if apprehensive of pursuit.

“For a considerable space of time I felt as one suffering in the nightmare, or those who in a burning house have no escape; but at last the hurricane and conflagration of my feelings began to subside, and I made an effort to collect my scattered thoughts, when my eye was attracted to several letters lying on the table, which the servant had laid there during the interview with Howard. Read them, for I can say no more. What name shall I use? It cannot be—

“ERRINGTON.”

CHAPTER XV.

THE first letter was a brief note from Lady Errington, written with an agitated hand, and scarcely legible.

“ MY LORD—

“ I CANNOT call you so—son would be absurd—Maria is my daughter—Mr. Buxton, who should have been Lord Errington, is so now, and proposes to marry her; your obstinacy has brought shame on me and ruin on yourself. Had you consented to my entreaty, the world had remained ignorant of a crime perpetrated in anguish. Quit the mansion to which you have no claim, and think of the detestation you must be ever to

“ ELEANOR ERRINGTON.”

The other letter was from Mr. Pomfret Buxton. In unfolding it, the Laird examined it inquisitively, for it was marked with several spots which indicated that tears had been shed on it, but whether in the writing or the reading, conjecture cannot determine. It was addressed to Stanley Buxton, Esq. but under cover to Lord Errington.

“Errington Castle.

“DEAR SIR,

“The address of this letter will acquaint you, that a heavy misfortune has overtaken us both; when I include myself, it is with perfect sincerity. I was content with my fortune, it was enough for my moderate desires, and your great talents made you fitter for the station that I am grieved will be resigned to me.

“Lady Errington has disclosed the unhappy stratagem, which the fretful impatience of the late Lord for a son induced her to practise at the birth of Maria, by exchanging her with the Howards for you. Her distress of mind is great, but considering how you must feel

this intelligence and its consequences, your sympathy cannot be expected ; all I can say for myself is, I earnestly wish to remain your friend,

“ P. BUXTON.”

When Ralston had finished the perusal, still holding the letter in his hand, he looked at Miss Sibby, expecting she would have made some remark, but she remained silent, and in consequence he lifted a third ; it was from the land-steward whom the changeling had left his own, and it showed how much that gentleman was faithful to his trusts, and merited the confidence of his employer.

“ Errington Grange.

“ SIR,

“ My Lord has directed me to inform you, that he requires no other account of the condition of the Errington estates, than the statement which I had the honour to submit to you last quarter ; and that he has instructed his solicitor, Mr. Terrier, to prepare a discharge for all the arrears that are due to him by you.

“ In this affair, I think it becomes me to acquaint you, that an attempt to retain the possession of any part of the property would be of no avail; the evidence is so strong and conclusive; but the case in no degree affects your moral character.

“ I am, with much respect, Sir,

“ Your most obedient servant,

“ KELPIN WYLES.”

“ To Stanley Buxton, Esq.”

“ Well, this is like business indeed,” subjoined the Laird, folding up the letter; “ what is your opinion, Miss Sibby?”

“ It’s a heart-of-stone letter; but it is a cordial to observe, that the new Lord is not just an absolute Nebuchadnezzar, and that he has been touched with the tenderness of a pitiful conscience for the situation of the unhappy Mr. — What will be his name now? for were I he, parents as they may have been in a course of nature, I would never reverence the cheatrie Howards as mine—Heh! Sirs. But the Babel brags of Mrs. Palmer have had a sudden downfal—set her up!

sib to nobility ! Effy Kleckings, the highland henwife, counts kindred with the Duke,—but the news none surprise me ; I was sure that little good was at the bottom of all yon parly-vooring about that darling dagon the daughter. Oh ! but the Lady Errington has been a hidden woman ! and so all her sweet love for our beloved daughter comes to have been only lavished on her own child ! But what's in your imagination and curiosity, Laird, concerning the cast-off Lord, that's now a lanerly wafe ? Be sure and tell Mr. Franks to let you know how he proposes to live ? May be, howsever, Mrs. Palmer has got an inkling of it, and as I must in christianity pay her a condoling visit in the morning, I'll try and find an occasion to discern. Well, who knows what a day will bring forth ? she was a peacock, both proud and stately, walking with a spread tail in the sun—but she's now draggled in the dirt—alas, alas ! it should make us all humble.”

How long Miss Sibby, had she not been interrupted, might have continued to pour the acetum of her charity, must ever remain a

blank in the book, and record of human actions. Her kinsman thought, however, she had given vent to quite enough, and abruptly rising, took several turns across the room without speaking.

She had never seen him so affected before ; for although his outward seeming disclosed no symptom of mental malady, her familiarity with his sober habits, taught her to see in his movements, and the thoughtfulness of his physiognomy, an excitement of no ordinary kind.

When he had walked some time, he stopped suddenly, and turning towards the spinster, who had resumed her needle, said—

“ Why should news like this molest us in so remote a corner ? why should Franks seek to awaken my sympathy with such communications. I knew but little of the unfortunate young man,—far less than he did ; and yet had I known him quite as well, his misfortunes could not have wounded me more. Bred up as he has been, with every circumstance of enviable honour and prosperity in his lot ; sud-

denly cast into an abyss from which he can never be extricated; made to suffer all the evil consequences of guilt—truly, my heart has never ached so keenly before.”

“Deed, Laird,” replied Miss Sibby, “ye must look on it with a more composed eye, for it’s all in the ordained course and order of things wherein the ‘sins of the fathers are visited on the children to the third and fourth generation,’ and he is only of the first.”

“True, Miss Ruart—but reflect how little he has been prepared for that state of the world in which he must now struggle, without a single one to help him, and at war with all who should have been dear to him—comparative poverty his constant guest, and ever haunted by that dismal spectre, the remembrance of what he was.”

“Bide awee, Laird, and give him your pity when he needs it. I know nothing of his capacity, but some men I have often heard surprise both friends and foes, when put to the stress of their talent. Who knows, but this adversity may be a God-send to prove the mettle he is made of.”

“ But I have heard, too, cousin, and from some who have examined the world with both eyes, that friendless ability is almost the worst capital stock a man can begin the business of life with, for in his endeavours to put it out to profit, he is apt to offend those who have less of it, and more of money and connexions. The proverb also says, that ‘ barks launched in foul weather are seldom lucky.’ ”

“ Your observes, Laird, have the weight of Solomon’s wisdom ; but considering that what the young man suffers comes of no fault of yours, you ought not to let it so trouble you.”

“ Perhaps, Miss Sibby, your admonition is prudent : I know, indeed, but little of this gentleman, but what I do makes me compassionately inclined towards him. His successor seems, however, a kind-hearted man, and will probably recollect his generosity to Miss Maria, when he believed himself to be the rightful Lord.”

“ He ought,” replied the Lady ; “ and if he willingly forgets it, he ill-deserves the fortune he has gotten so easily from the young man’s honesty.”

CHAPTER XVI.

DEEPLY as the friends of our hero were agitated by the unhappy disclosure of the mystery with which he had been environed, it can easily be imagined with what far keener feelings he was himself affected. Still his natural equanimity enabled him to bear the shock without evincing any very remarkable outward claim to sympathy, whatever he may have inwardly felt.

When he had dispatched the packet for Mr. Franks, with the contents of which the reader has just been made acquainted, he resolved instantly to leave the house, and immediately began to make some preparation; but accustomed, in even the most trivial concerns,

to be always assisted by his valet, he paused in his task, and resuming his seat, gazed vacantly at the confusion of books, papers, trinkets, and ornaments which lay scattered around in his dressing-room, where he then happened to be.

When he had idly looked at them for some time, the thought suddenly struck him that not one of them all was his ; and that he had only to retire, leaving them untouched.

“ What is then to be done ? ” he exclaimed to himself ; “ I am utterly helpless ; no profession to resort to—no individual on whom I have any claim to aid me. It is fortunate, however, that Parliament is not sitting ; and that I am spared from the mortification which would have overwhelmed me, had I taken my seat—what seat ?—all honour to which ambition aspires, and I had my share of that noble passion, must now be forgone ; my course of life hereafter is downward—other men may be emulous of distinction, but I must seek to escape the very notice of mankind.”

He then made an effort to rouse himself

from this depression, and resumed the gathering of his loose papers and letters into his writing-desk.

“ This will never do,” said he ; “ it is not by lamenting, that my condition is to be mitigated. I must now apply to those resources which I am conscious of possessing—but for what purpose?—to make me more observed ! one whom Destiny prompts, by no common circumstance, to avoid the thoroughfares of man ! But I have a task to perform, and it should be done speedily. I must nerve myself to bear it : the fact of the discovered fraud cannot be long hidden. The servants, perhaps, already suspect the truth—they will soon hear all ! Would it become me to quit this house and not inform them of the cause ? ”

At this thought he wrung his hands in great emotion, and looked on all sides, as if in quest of some one to consult ; he then threw himself on a chair, in a state of perturbation that would not be controlled, and again gave utterance to his feelings.

“ Franks will come to me as soon as he has received my letter—I think he will—but

he may shun the falling tree. It is the way of the world, as I have often heard, and now must prove—I'll request him to inform the servants—it will protect me from a scene. How could I tell them that my father was—but is Howard my father? He did not speak as if I were his son! and yet the constant tenderness of my nurse, his wife, leaves me no room for hope. Alas! it is a tie that cannot be broken—but all men have some special evil in their lives; and my peculiar bane was in my birth. Nor am I singular in my suffering—it is but similar to the ail of those whose thoughts are tainted with their parents' shame."

In this attempt to alleviate his mingled anxiety and revulsion, he was for some time successful. The current of his thoughts ran into a smoother channel; and he derived a false consolation from reflecting how many, even of the most apparently happy of the world, have to deplore an inheritance of guilt. It was, however, but a transitory calm; the consciousness of his helpless condition returned with alarm upon him; and he shook like one

who has gone astray in the desert, and can discover no path. His situation was, indeed, peculiar; all the charities of his heart were troubled; and though he could not accuse his parents' crime of grossness in the commission, yet the refinement with which the sentiment of honour had been fostered in himself, by education, made him regard it with severe repugnance.

At times this revolt would soften towards his mother; and in the yearning of his heart for something to be kind to, he would half persuade himself that she had been a constrained participator in the deception, which had placed them all in such jeopardy; for he could not conceal from himself, that he had retained the rights and title of Lord Errington after he had entertained some suspicion of the truth. It was, indeed, that suspicion which had chiefly constituted his distress, apparently so disproportioned to any cause Mr. Franks could discover in his visible circumstances.—The offspring of a pure mind, the child of integrity, as the poet beautifully says,

it was conceived in delicacy, and filled him for a moment with exquisite contrition.

He did not, however, long repine at the thought of his craftless delinquency ; but soon framed an excuse for himself, that was more consistent with his lot.

“ My error,” said he aloud, “ is not of a very criminal hue : I dreaded to think that the case could be as I feared it was, and I was deceived by the possibilities of my own hopes. Wyles, by his letter, evidently thinks I might still, for a while, retain possession ; but his advice to submit is that of honesty ; and certainly, if I have, from weakness, done wrong, I should at once apply the remedy. I hope Franks will come—I need him much—I will commit every thing to his discretion ; and though the past cannot be redeemed, he may prevent the present from incurring any darker stain, and suggest something, that in the future will not be painful to recollect.”

But the tenour of his thoughts, and the troubled shiftings of his mind, defy the colour-

ing of words to express. Throughout the whole forenoon he remained alone, as if sequestered meditation could, in any degree, change either the shape or nature of the things he contemplated; and ever and anon he wondered to himself, why the servant sent with the letters to Mr. Franks lingered so long by the way; while now and then a doubt would chilly cross his apprehension, lest the intelligence he had communicated should have produced a worldly impression on his friend, and he said, with irrepressible sadness,

“Wherefore should it? his fortune makes him far above a summer friend; and the interest he has taken in my personal affliction, shows that he was not entirely attached to my former rank, but had some friendship for myself. Perhaps, however, he may dread the inroads of that necessity which he cannot but clearly see must soon overtake me; and adversity gives him a plea to run from my side. God help me! must I then prepare myself for such abandonment? Yes; I am shipwrecked, cast upon the shore, and still welter-

ing amid the waves. 'Tis hazardous to lend a hand, and to stoop so low as to snatch me from the breakers."

While thus indulging in these apprehensive reflections, it occurred to him, that though his misfortunes might palliate the neglect on that day of many duties, they were yet not so overwhelming as to render him incapable of acknowledging the kindness of Lord Errington; accordingly, to withdraw his attention from his own anxieties, and to evince his sense of obligation, he drew paper towards him, and addressed his Lordship.

It was a brief, but a heartfelt and animated effusion; expressive alike of his readiness to acquiesce in whatever his Lordship might determine concerning the claims on him, and of the sense of obligation with which he had received the assurance of his regard.

Having finished the note, he then rang the bell for a light to seal it with, and while his valet was bringing the candle, he took up a pen to address it. In this act, his hand so trembled, that he was unable before the man

returned. The servant's re-entrance, however, had the effect of re-establishing him in some degree of self-possession; and he immediately wrote the superscription, to Lord Errington.

Happening to observe that the man's eye glanced at the letter, he pushed it, carelessly, more under his sight, in a manner somewhat particular, and looked him steadily in the face, as if in expectation of some effect; but, to his surprise, there was none: on the contrary, it seemed to be regarded with such indifference as things anticipated are commonly considered, which convinced him that the domestics were already acquainted with his altered condition. Perhaps this conviction ought not to have much disturbed him; but when the servant called him "Sir," instead of "my Lord," as usual, he felt his fortitude subsiding: at the same moment the footman who had been to Mr. Franks, returned without an answer.

"No answer!" cried he, impatiently, but with an accent that betokened more of sorrow than of disappointment.

"None," said the man ; and, with an indescribable look, he added, "none, Sir," dwelling with emphasis on Sir.

"You may retire," was the agitated reply, accompanied with a wave of the hand, as a signal, averting his head at the same moment to conceal a sudden tear.

CHAPTER XVII.

DESERTED in his utmost need, Stanley Buxton soon withdrew from the splendid mansion, which he had so lately called his own. Of the state of his mind on the evening when he found himself alone in his new lodgings, it would be ineffectual to attempt a description. The reader must from his own feelings and fancy endeavour to supply the blank ; for a young man of talent, educated with the highest refinement, and accustomed to conceive himself of that privileged order, the members of which have hitherto, in England, deemed themselves only exposed by their own will to the vicissitudes of pecuniary fortune, thrown helpless on the world, is a subject that the humane and the metaphysical may alike contem-

plate with interest and compassion; but they will ever be unable to form any adequate estimate of the anguish which, for a time, supplants in his bosom the very faculties of reflection.

On the morning of the third day after our hero had sequestered himself, to ruminate of that forlorn condition for which he was so ill prepared, and to determine the line and course of life he should pursue, Mr. Franks unexpectedly entered his apartment; but what took place between them, will be better told by Franks' letter on the occasion, than by any description of ours.

“ London.

“ DEAR RALSTON,

“ MY last will have led you to expect some account of our unfortunate friend; for, though you were formerly but slightly acquainted with him, the sad tale I have had to tell must have made you regard him with the interest and sympathy of friendship, or I misunderstand the nature of your feelings.

“ My anxiety concerning him, made Brigh-

ton irksome ; insomuch that, before the second day was well over, I began to question the propriety of my conduct in being there ; and before the evening, this doubt became so unpleasant, that I resolved to return. I am now more content with myself ; and Stanley Buxton, the name he has resumed, thinks better of me, than I suspect he did during my prudential evasion.

“ I am vexed with myself, to have imagined for a moment he would hesitate in surrendering the Errington rights ; but I have been sufficiently punished for the injustice. Situation makes character ; and this poor fellow rises magnificently in my opinion, since the vestment of rank and fortune has been resigned.

“ When I entered his room this morning, he was alone, paler than usual, with the look of an invalid ; and his manner was in some degree restrained. I felt as if I had come before one offended with me, and was, for a moment, humbled as if he had just cause ; but it was only for a moment—his ceremonious aspect soon vanished, and he welcomed me

with warmth and a kind of earnest cheerfulness which implied satisfaction with himself, for having given me his confidence. I was the first, however, that broke silence in allusion to what had taken place, by saying,

“ ‘You have done as your friends wished.’

“ He smiled as I said this, and looking with a curious, indescribable glance at me, replied :

“ ‘Then you thought it possible I might have acted otherwise? You forget that I was bred a Lord.’

“ I felt the blood rush into my face at the delicacy of this just reproof, and endeavoured to extenuate the doubt which my words had insinuated, when he interrupted me.

“ ‘I know not why it is,’ said he, ‘but I feel myself constrained, as it were, by some influence inherited from the station I have quitted, to be guardedly punctilious. It prompts me to recollect that I may be still a gentleman.’

“ Some general conversation concerning his affairs and intentions then took place, and I inquired if he had yet formed any plan of life,

telling him that my father had requested me to say our counting-house, and his friendship, were ready for him — his answer was manly, even affecting; but he informed me that he had only as yet thought vaguely on the subject, adding, however, that he felt inclined to study for the bar, and in the mean time to go abroad for a few months.

“ ‘ Have you seen aught of Howard since the disclosure ?’

“ ‘ My father,’ laying emphasis on the phrase, ‘ has been recently with me. I must not now be over fastidious, though I shall not take his name, chiefly because many know me who may not have heard that I ever bore a title. I must avoid the necessity of making explanations. This is my principal reason ; but I am not altogether insensible to the mortification of having parents guilty of so foul a fraud.’

“ ‘ It is a pity that the elevation of your sentiments cannot be known to the world,’ was my reply, touched with a sentiment of respect mingled with sorrow—subjoining, ‘ it is some compensation for the loss of rank and fortune to be conscious that you have been able to

lay them down without becoming a meaner man.'

"He took my hand with emotion, and said with a smile—

" 'I have, however, my regrets.'

" 'Doubtless,' cried I ; 'and when you call to mind, how easily all these disasters might have been averted, had you only complied with Lady Errington's wish—'

" 'Say no more of that,' was his eager interruption ; you know not what were my motives for refusal, nor can conceive how much the cause enhances the bitterness of my present condition. My affections were engaged, fortunately I had not disclosed them, and now they can never be.'

"This was expressed with a tenderness that sank into my heart, and was followed by a silence that had so much of sadness in it, as to awe me from making any reply. The extent of his misfortune seemed to expand, and I sat for some time regarding him with something of that hallowed sentiment with which we contemplate the monuments of illustrious men, or the vestiges of ancient grandeur. After some

time I bade him adieu, and with a promise to see him again in the evening, came away with a heavy heart.

“The impression he has left on me, is very inexplicable; for, great as his misfortunes undoubtedly are, and singular as his talents may be considered, his air and manner, for I have no fitter terms to apply to his thoughtfulness and dignity, are still more interesting. It is not by what he says that he overpowers me: but by the living spirit that shines forth around him. This remarkable young man, remarkable by his history, but more by the feelings which he so sedulously cherishes, has about him something that suggests imaginations akin to prophecy. Will he not be a great man? surely he has the power; and yet before that night on which he first divulged his unhappiness, I had seen nothing in him to justify the deference that his genius now exacts.

“I reflect on his conversation, as if I should be able to discover in it something bright and valuable; but although every word remains indelible with me, I can find in them only the

plain expressions of an unaffected heart. The remembrance is like the withered flowers that still retain their perfume—they show no beauty, but their fragrance recalls to mind the hue and the charm of their blooming; verily, it must be in the eloquence of his utterance: I could be fanciful, and call it a diapason in harmony with thoughts which adversity has tuned. How I should like to scan the reveries and speculations which he enjoys in the midst of his perplexities! Enjoys! yes, it is the only word that can convey any idea of the secret ecstasy, as I conceive, evolved by his reflections in being deprived of all that can make life desirable, blended with the consciousness of having honourably withstood the temptation to retain them. We do injustice to the private virtues, when we deem them of a softer element than the bold qualities which enable men openly to resist and defy the onsets of public adventure; but I am making him a theme for sounding sentences, and the postman is already in the street.

“ Ever yours,

“ H. FRANKS.”

“Heigh, Sirs, but that is a melodious letter,” said Miss Sibby, to whom the Laird had read it aloud, “both most affecting and pleasant; but its not so full of a particularity as it might have been, coming as it has from the hand of a merchant. It’s, however, an edification to hear how peaceably the broken Lord sits down with his overthrow like other dethroned potentates. But I wonder what Mrs. Palmer says, and if her sister will now come to Scotland; we really, Mr. Ralston, must be on our guard if she does, for she being naturally, as it is plain to be seen, of a conspeerating turn, who can tell what mischief she may brew in a homely country part of the king’s realm like this: such-like neighbours need vigilance. My word, their rise has been but a balloon’s flight, up to the clouds and down again. And the poor young man to have a touch of the tender passion too! I wonder who his Jo could be? It is most melancholious; really, take it one thing with another, a more pitiful story could not well happen in an ordinary novel, though

I am creditably informed that it is a common practice among the Englishers, to make changelings of their own bairns for the sake of male heirs."

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHETHER Mrs. Howard ever communicated to her sister the discovery of the machination by which Stanley Buxton had been substituted as the heir of the Errington title and domains, was never ascertained to the full satisfaction of Miss Sibby Ruart, notwithstanding that in her researches there was no lack of industry. The discovery, however, was to her far from being so interesting as it ought to have been, and indeed was calculated to be, for the Laird imposed his strictest injunctions on her, not to talk on the subject to any one, and particularly to be guarded and silent towards the Domine and his wife, which, considering the pleasure she might have enjoyed and given in discussing the particulars of such a story with Mrs. Keckle

and other friends, was a great hardship, and being a hardship, it surely came from an act both of oppression and injustice. No man has any right to stint to others the felicities of this world—Heaven knows they are few enough !

But in the course of a fortnight after the receipt of the intelligence with which we have made the courteous reader acquainted, Miss Sibby read in the newspaper, that the marriage of Lord Errington with the beautiful Miss Maria, the protégée of the Dowager, as she was called, had taken place. The Laird at the time happened to be in Edinburgh, and as no restriction with respect to speaking of the event had been laid on her discretion, and as she owed something like a grudge to Mrs. Palmer, for the loftiness of her manner when they had formerly discoursed of it, believing Miss Maria to be her niece, she resolved forthwith to bestow on her the affliction of her sympathy ; and would, with shawl and pattens, have instantly set out for the Academy-house, had not the evening been unpropitious to her promptitude. It was cold, raw, and showery, and the hour betokened that her return would be nocturnal ;

she was in consequence under the necessity of placing a bridle on her impatience till the morning; a fortunate circumstance, as she otherwise might have missed an interesting occurrence.

Scarcely had she, in submission to time and weather, reluctantly consented to defer her visit, when a post-chaise came to the door with an unknown stranger, who inquired for the Laird, and who, being informed of his absence, expressed himself so much disappointed, that Miss Sibby was induced to go to the hall-door, and invite him to alight.

"I have come a considerable journey on purpose to see him," said the stranger, "and since he is in Edinburgh, I must return immediately. It is of the utmost consequence to see him with the least possible delay."

Miss Sibby again entreated that he would alight; adding, "and if you must turn your horses' heads the other way, let me give you a glass of wine, or a dish of tea, to enable you to travel through the night, which is going, you see, to be dark and dismal. I beseech you, Sir, to come in, for Mr. Ralston would be very ill

pleased, were I to let any of his friends away in a knotless manner—Who shall I say has been calling?”

“I have not the honour of being known to him; but as I have not dined, I will gladly accept a crust of bread and a glass of wine,” so saying he alighted.

Miss Sibby, who was standing at the door, immediately turned round to walk in, but almost at the same moment she looked behind with an inquisitive eye, and inquired if he preferred port or sherry. Her expression was of classical simplicity; but the manner in which it was said, and the look with which it was accompanied, showed that her spirit was moved from its lowest depths with curiosity, the constitutional sin that chiefly beset her. The stranger observed it, and paused for an instant, as if he thought she knew him; it was, however, but for an instant, for conscious of the improbability, he immediately rallied his self-possession, and followed her into the parlour.

When he had taken a seat, and the servant was setting out the decanters, our maiden friend examined him from top to toe, for he was a

person of few words, and the conversation in consequence consisted of but short sentences, leaving ample room and verge enough for the remarks of her scrutiny.

He seemed to be on the downhill side of life, correct in his appearance, powdered and dressed with care, but not altogether with the ease of a gentlemanly style. His cravat, for example, tied in the mode, was in the extreme of neatness, but evidently of the second day, and twice laid. His waistcoat was of a bright printed speckled cotton stuff, respectable in the quality, but of a kind which gentlemen seldom wear; and his blue coat, with yellow buttons, was of a cut that had been out of fashion the preceding year, yet not much worn withal; and his air and mien bespoke a landlord of the better sort of posting inns, rather than a member of the sylvan squirarchy. Indeed he had nothing urbane about him, though his manners were smooth and pliant, to a degree even more than townly.

“Who can he be?” said the shrewd lady to herself, “nothing under a gentleman would be travelling in a post-chaise by himself, for

it's no a retour ; but he's an Englisher, and that fact accounts for the extravagance,"—then she sheathed her tongue in a soft lisp, and with the most polite and condescending accents invited him to help himself to the wine.

"You cannot be out the need of it," said she, "travelling so far this afternoon, for I'm sure its not a step less than five-and-thirty miles from here to Edinburgh."

"It can be no less," replied the stranger, "but the road seemed to me much longer, it is so dull; and I have never been in this country before."

"Dear me! that's most extraordinary;—really, I'm very sorry Mr. Ralston is from home, but he will be here to-morrow night. The public in Greenknowes is a very cleanly and homely house; being a stranger, and so fatigued, would it not be as well to bide there the night?"

"Greenknowes!" exclaimed the unknown, "am I then so near that village?"

"It's just a step, Sir, across the bean-field. Had the weather not threatened, I would have been there at this very time myself. Ye seemed

to have heard of Greenknowes. Our minister, Mr. Keckle, is a most worthy character."

"Is not Mr. Palmer his curate?"

"Oh no, he's the Session clerk, and keeps the Academy. There is not a better school in the west of Scotland; perhaps you know it? May-be its by that ye have heard of Greenknowes?"

The stranger was on the point of answering the question, but suddenly checking himself, filled his glass and drank it off, while the searching Sibylla resumed—

"We have had at the academy young gentlemen from the uttermost ends of the earth: But ye have heard of Mr. Palmer?"

"I have, Madam, particularly of his wife, she's—" Miss Sibby interrupted him, by pressing him to help himself again, adding,

"He has sent out many a well educated lad, and has a merit in the teaching line by common. Was ever any of your acquaintance at his school? But perhaps you have only heard what has happened to Mrs. Palmer? I'm sure every body that hears the tale will sympathee with her misfortune."

A slight tinge of crimson darkened the hue of the stranger's complexion ; he made, however no answer, and she continued—

“ But I have not heard all the rights of it ; were Mr. Ralston at home, he could tell you. It's a pitiful case.”

“ And what is thought of Mr. and Mrs. Howard in the business ? ” inquired the stranger eagerly.

“ Oh ! then ye have heard of them ? but no doubt their names and surnames are newspaper clash by this time. Do you think their punishment will be a transportation for life ? ”

“ Madam,” cried the stranger, becoming as pale as ashes, “ Madam, is such a thing possible ? ”

“ I have certainly not heard so, but something will come of the true Lord Errington's marrying the Miss Maria-daughter, which is in this night's Courier.”

The stranger did not surely attend to what Miss Sibby said, for he abruptly rose, and was on the point of leaving the room without even thanking her for the hospitality of his reception ; when suddenly recollecting himself, he

halted, and with an embarrassed manner, begged her pardon, and alleged that he was forgetting the journey he had to perform back to Edinburgh, requesting at the same time the Laird's address there.

CHAPTER XIX.

NEXT morning, as the Laird sat at breakfast, the stranger, who had reached Edinburgh during the night, made his appearance. Without giving his name, he inquired rather abruptly if Mr. Franks and his friend had yet arrived from London. Something in the manner of putting the question moved the easy good-nature of Mr. Kалston, who, instead of replying directly to the point, said that he had not heard before of their intended visit.

“Then you know that Mr. Stanley Buxton is the friend I allude to?”

Certainly it was of him the Laird thought when he answered the inquiry, but as he had not mentioned any name, he was surprised at the remark, and immediately conjecturing that

possibly the stranger might be Howard, rejoined,

“Have not you come from London?” adding, before an answer could be given, “Is your name Howard?”

A slight bow of acknowledgment confirmed the conjecture, and Mr. Ralston requesting him to take a chair, for he had not before invited him to be seated, was roused to the utmost possible of his sedate temperament; a short pause then ensued, and both seemed in some degree of perplexity—at last Howard mustered resolution to say,

“I presume, Sir, you have heard of the misfortune that has happened in the Errington family?”

“Misfortune! what misfortune? I have heard of the fraud,” replied the Laird, with a severity that for a moment disconcerted the self-possession of Howard.

“It was the stratagem of her Ladyship, and we are all ruined. But every thing is given up to the rightful heir; we have nothing left, only the blame of having been the tools of Lady Errington.”

The Laird, albeit his habitual composure, astonished at the self-palliation which this implied, looked for nearly an entire minute with the utmost sternness that he could throw into his countenance, and then, as if his indignation had suddenly subsided, he replied with an inflection of voice that indicated more of sorrow and sympathy,

“ Lord Errington will, without question, consider the helplessness into which your son has fallen, and how freely and honourably he has surrendered all.”

“ But, Sir, he refuses. I thought his Lordship would have at least given him back the fortune my son proposed to settle on Miss Maria, when she was believed to be my daughter.”

“ Howard, you have been spared from punishment ; deceive not yourself—you have been a conspirator in a great crime, and but for the probity of him who suffers the grief of calling you father, you must have reaped the deserts of your perfidy.”

“ I but obeyed the will of my Lady, to preserve peace in the family. Had my son married Miss Maria, their children would——”

“I advise you, Howard, to dismiss that erroneous imagination. Your own criminal ambition was the spur of your guilt? Would you have allowed the child of any other to have been substituted for your Lord’s?”

Howard, whenever any sudden disagreeable question surprised him, was apt to change colour, and appear for a moment jaundiced and ghastly—he became so to a greater degree than usual at this, but remained silent.

“You cannot defend yourself; you dare not, for your conscience;” continued the Laird with an accent almost of passion; and again lowering his voice into sadness, shook his head as he added—“Howard, Howard, you must be conscious of your offence, and as a person of integrity, for I have heard you ever were, save in this fraudulent business, you should rather tremble at the hazards you have ventured to incur, than think so unwisely of the advantages that might have been gained, had no disclosure taken place. It was a daring risk to impose your own son for your master’s heir.”

“I did not do so; my lady tempted me, and the trick was hers,” cried the penitent, co-

vering his face with his hands, and bursting into tears.

“What say you?” exclaimed Mr. Ralston.

“I came here to tell all,” was the reply.

“Is there yet more mystery? and wherefore have you sought me? I know but little of your victim! I fear, Howard, you are deeper in crime than the worst that has been thought of you. But wherefore have you come to me?”

“I am driven into poverty, my son is utterly ruined, and has left London with Mr. Franks, to consult you, as I suspect—I have followed them, but came faster by the mail.”

“And for what purpose have you come?”

“I would be reconciled. Alas! Sir, trusting in the secret, I took no care to save my honest earnings.”

“Is not your son in equal necessity?—Unhappy man! you are tasting now the bitter of your own brewing. But why is Mr. Franks bringing your son here?”

“I know not their purpose, but only that they are coming, and I entreat your mediation to make us friends.”

"I will speak plainly, Howard—you seem insensible to the sordidness of your own nature. What is there in your son's power, whom, having so irreparably injured, you yet think it may be of service to yourself to conciliate."

"He is still my son, and his poor mother's heart is breaking because he casts us off."

"Your's, Howard, is made of sterner stuff: answer me without equivocation, and according to your answer I will decide how I should act:—What motive stirs you to seek so eagerly a reconciliation?"

"My poverty.—In a few weeks I must be in want, and who will ever now engage me again?"

The Laird looked at him, and from commiserating his wretchedness, felt himself incited to reply fervently,

"Howard, vice is a fruitful mother. In what way can your impoverished son help you?"

"Heaven, thy hand is on me!" was the only answer that the wretched man could make.

"Be candid, Howard, incur no darker stain.

Tell me what it is that moves you, for it is too palpable that you at least think it may yet be in your son's power to assist you?"

"It may, it may! I know that the main cause which made him reject Miss Maria was his regard for another, and I have since learnt, that since the fatal discovery, the lady has openly avowed how much she was attached to him."

The Laird with ineffable contempt said, "Well, and what then?"

"Perhaps a marriage might——"

"Man!" exclaimed Mr. Ralston, rising, "Have you not done mischief enough? But I will listen to you no farther; would you make me a party to your stratagems? Go, quit the house; you have escaped too well."

"Hear me, Sir," cried Howard; "I beseech you do not so rashly condemn me. It will kill his mother if we be not reconciled."

"And his father!" replied the Laird, his indignation abating, "how will he feel? Howard, you ask me to undertake a task which compassion for your wife already pleads with irresistible entreaty. But I can hold no farther discourse with you. Miserable man! you

have the worst quality of the bad, in being unconscious of the sin of your own guilt. You dread its consequences, but impunity is not innocence."

Howard at these words retired from his kindling indignation, and with a pale and perturbed visage left the house. His perturbation, however, was not greater than that of Mr. Ralston himself, who, naturally of a mild disposition, inclining to piety, had experienced in the course of their conversation such a painful excitement, amounting in more than one instance nearly to disgust, that the moment he was out of sight, it flashed up into a blaze scarcely mitigated by his pity for the unfortunate son.

CHAPTER XX.

WE are talkative of the faults of our neighbours, but often silent on their merits, as if a wish were father to a doubt respecting them ; so would have said the invidious Frenchman ; and Mr. Franks, with all his apparent un-remarking of character, had seen enough of the world to be convinced of the truth. He had even obtained some degree of insight into other matters, and things quite as curious, and from among them had arrived at this conclusion, that although the memory of a neighbour's misfortune seldom lives long, it is sure to be revived with a harsh comment whenever any incident occurs with a tendency to stir it. Accordingly, on the morning when he heard of Lord Errington's marriage, he went

to Stanley Buxton, and urged him to leave town immediately.

"This occurrence," said he, "with the rumour of what has already taken place, will render your situation more irksome; for notwithstanding the ingenuity with which you have kept aloof from former acquaintance, you cannot walk the streets without falling in with some of them, and being compelled to hear from those who may not have heard of the change in your condition, observations that were as well avoided." But his letter of the same day, and which Mr. Ralston received soon after Howard had left him, explains more minutely the tenour of what passed.

"London.

"DEAR RALSTON,

"Almost as soon as you receive this you may expect Buxton and me in Edinburgh; we leave town this evening, and though it is not our intention to travel very rapidly, we shall be only a day or two longer on the road than the mail. The resolution to visit you has been rather hastily adopted, but you can easily understand the motive which has induced me

to take him out of London at this time ; something of his disastrous story begins to be publicly known, and the marriage of Lord Errington, announced in the paper of this morning, will have the effect of making it speedily more so.

“ But besides withdrawing him for a time from the eyes of the world, I have a reason of my own for wishing to see you. My father has at last consented that I may abandon the counting-house, which was every day becoming more and more disagreeable, and I am now determined to turn lawyer. The decision of Buxton has probably influenced me in the choice of that profession, for until he had quite made up his mind, I continued hesitating.—So much for *ego*.

“ I have, however, another topic, which gives me serious uneasiness. Buxton, with that high-mindedness which he still cherishes despite his altered circumstances, gave up every thing, but only the trinkets and the money which happened to be on his person when he received the news of his misfortune ; even these, but for my persuasion, he was inclined also to part with.

Thus he is about to rise in the world, from the very zero of fortune, oppressed with the tastes and habits of a peer. I speak lightly, because, were I to indulge my feelings as they are sometimes moved when thinking of him, it would lead me into a more sentimental strain than is exactly in unison with expediency. My father has in the mean time, of his own accord, acted very generously; he has supplied his purse, and I know has placed at his credit a considerable sum to be furnished from time to time as it may be required. This munificence of the old gentleman has curiously affected me. Tacitus says there is no hatred so inveterate as that of those who have done us wrong; and I feel, that benefits where we esteem, form the best cement of friendship on the giver's side. Doubtless, the merits of Buxton would, with the intimacy recently grown up between us, have made me regard him with warmth and respect, but that my father should have taken so friendly an interest in his misfortunes, justifies as it were my own particular attachment.

“Howard has not been with him for upwards of a fortnight, but his wife frequently.

I cannot speak of them as his father and mother, such is the strength of my wish that they were not, and the grief of my regret in thinking how irreparably he has been injured. No future success can appease the anguish with which their guilty acquiescence in the folly of Lady Errington has afflicted his own remembrance, and blemished him in the opinion of others; for, disguise the fact as we may, the world insensibly looks upon the unfortunate as stained with blame, even while acknowledging their innocence.

“The shipwreck of this amiable young man has been of no common kind. In addition to all the difficulties which beset talents and worth in circumstances of extreme poverty, he has inherited in the offence of his parents a moral scrofula that must ever mar his efforts. The pang of this reflection is redoubled, by the apprehension that his delicacy will soon revolt at the notoriety of public life. I wish, for his own sake, he had preferred the Church to the Law, and I have said so to him, reminding him that he had a claim to partake the patronage of Lord Errington, and I would rejoice were

he yet to change his mind. Keep this hint in view, for we shall often when together have occasion to speak of his chances in the game of life; and I am fearful, though his ability cannot be questioned, that circumstances have yet rendered him perhaps unfit for the course he proposes to pursue.

“Yours ever,

“HENRY FRANKS.”

When Mr. Ralston had read this characteristic effusion of the sympathy which his ardent friend so strongly felt for the changling, he laid the letter on the table beside him, and turning round to face the fire, dropped his hands between his knees, and leaned in a ruminating posture forward. After sitting in this position some time, he then resumed his breakfast, and being alone, and no restraint upon the utterance of his cogitations, he now and then allowed himself to think aloud.

“Franks,” said he, “has done right to remove him from London; but why has he brought him here? any watering-place would have done as well.—Why, too, has his father come?”

and wherefore has the fellow scented me out? what can he know of me? It may, however, be but one of those wild despairing plunges which the drowning make to catch at straws. Doubtless he has heard that Gowans is in the vicinity of Greenknowes, the residence of his wife's sister,—and—what then?—'Tis a puzzle, and I have not the head to unravel such a tangled hank.

“But it may be all simple, unpremeditated? Sometimes I have heard it said, and have indeed myself observed, that nothing is more puzzling in the conduct of men than simplicity of purpose. I may, even now, be brooding on chalk. It is, however, in the spirit of mystery to engender mystery, and the vile machination which has already worked evil enough, may perhaps be the cause of the suspicions which so perplex me. What suspicions?—there is nothing now to suspect—and it cannot be strange that a distressed man should flee for a time from the malice of the world. A few hours, however, will explain all; it is but thriftless work to cast thoughts as children do bubbles, which burst as they are

blown ; idle dreams that vanish in the element
"wherein they come to pass."

At this point of his reverie, a bustle was heard in the hall of the hotel, amidst which the Laird discovered the voice of his correspondent, giving directions concerning the luggage. The travellers had arrived ; the journey of Howard to Gowans having allowed time to enable them to reach Edinburgh so soon after him.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN the mean time Miss Sibby Ruart had not been idle. Much about the time that the Laird in Edinburgh had sat down to breakfast, she prepared herself for a visit to the village. But upon consideration of many things which the courteous reader will discern of his own sagacity, she resolved rather than proceed to the academy-house, to go at once to the manse, to hear what Mrs. Keckle, the Minister's wife, had gleaned or gathered concerning so many important occurrences—occurrences which, in the imagination of our intelligent spinster, were scarcely less than signs denoting the fulness of time.

As the manse stood at the farther end of the village, she might have been at some loss to

account to Mrs. Palmer, had she met with her, for passing the door of the academy-house without calling; but setting a stout heart to a stay brae, she courageously adventured onward, and soon found herself safe and unmolested near the consecrated dwelling.

Notwithstanding our acknowledged penetration, we have not yet been able to ascertain to our entire satisfaction how it happens that manse and jointure houses, as well as all the other life-rent tenements in Scotland, uniformly exhibit comparative negligence. They are always far inferior in condition to that of the dwelling-places of those invested with a more permanent interest in the property than the brittle tenure of life. Whereas, in England, the very reverse is the case. Parsonages, and the residences of spinsters, and dowagers, and half-pay officers, are all and ever of the trimmest order, adorned with holyhocks, evergreens, and boxwood borders. Possibly, it may be owing to that superiority in philosophy for which the Scottish nation are so distinguished; for without question, their skill in the science of political economy must enable them to appreciate

more correctly the nothingness of life. It suits not, however, our present purpose to enter into any particular disquisition concerning this impressive fact ; we have been only incidentally led to notice it here, by recollecting the aspect and circumstances of the manse of Greenknowes, towards which, in the raw of a blustering November morning, Miss Sibby Ruart went wrestling against the wind.

This parochial habitation was, in the time of our young remembrance, a structure in that style of architecture which befitted the appropriation—a sober, plain, two-story mansion with wings. Three windows illuminated in front the first floor, and one at each side of the door furnished daylight to the ground one. It stood in the middle of the glebe, and in approaching towards it, the urbane stranger remarked with various sentiments that the rough casting which covered the walls had fallen off in several places ; that divers panes of the windows were broken, or mended with brown paper and sham-panes of board, painted by the village carpenter with coffin blacking ; that what had been a gravel walk to the entrance when the existing

incumbent was inducted, had become as a common road, rutted by wheels, and ragged in its grassy borders; and that the oval plot before the door was overgrown with rank shrubs, vulgar flowers, and colts'-foot; monitors to the pastor, admonishing him that for all the remainder of his time in this world, it would be a waste of money to improve the ornaments, farther than by occasionally delving the earth about the roots in the spring.

Miss Sibby was descried from the parlour window advancing by Mrs. Keckle herself, who immediately went to the door to receive her, and welcomed her with some degree of surprise at seeing her abroad on so rough a morning; adding, however, in a tone of greeting and gladness, that the visit was most seasonable and acceptable.

"Deed," Miss Sibby, said Mrs. Keckle, as she ushered her into the untenanted parlour, "this is a very almous both to me and the minister, for last night, in a most extraordinary manner, as if she had fallen out of the lift, our niece was landed out of Mrs. Chrighton's

chaise from London : a winsome creature she is, and though come of my blood, the minister is as cogy about her as if she were of his own pedigree."

"And who is your niece? I never heard of her before, though it was ay said ye had a brother in England, settled as a gradawa doctor, and rich as a crisis."

"No' just so rich; but she's his daughter;" replied Mrs. Keckle; "a lovely, lilly-like lassie; she's been in an ailing inclination of late, and her father thought a change of air would maybe help to recruit her; and so having an excellent opportunity in the return of our neighbour Mrs. Chrighton to Woodhall, he sent her to spend the winter in quietude with me, for sobriety is what she needs most; I, to be sure, would have been better pleased had he given me notice to make a preparation for her, but with your kind help, and Mrs. Palmer's of the semindary, we'll do our best to entertain her."

Events, thought Miss Sibby to herself, as the minister's wife was speaking, are fast thick-

ening and growing to consequence. But before she had time to moralize on the subject, Mrs. Keckle resumed—

“The doctor, my brother, in his letter says, that he wishes of all things that Julia—that’s her name—may not visit much, for her distemper needs repose; and sure enough, poor thing, she is very melancholious; but I have a notion, and so has the minister, that we have seen into the nature of her complaint further than her father, with all his skill.”

“And what think you it is, Mrs. Keckle?”

“Just a disappointment; for she inclines to sit by herself at the window, with her cheek on her hand, which, from your own experience, Miss Sibby, I need not tell you is a symptom.”

“Heigho!” was the involuntary reply; as if this description of maiden-hopelessness reminded Miss Sibby of some similar attitude of her own i’ the olden time—at least it was calculated to make Mrs. Keckle believe so, though there never had been any reason for the surmise. But their discourse was suddenly interrupted by the sound of a slow, soft footstep descending the stair, and the minister’s wife holding up her right

forefinger looked a silent admonition and whispered,

“It is herself.”

At the same moment the door was opened, and the pale and pensive Julia revealed herself, but seeing a stranger in the room, immediately withdrew.

“That was a glimpse of the sun,” cried Miss Sibby; having no readier image to convey a bright enough idea of her beauty. “But, Mrs. Keckle, there’s something no’ right yonder; I never saw a young lady shine with such a gleam of delicacy that had not a catastrophe in her heart; she’s indeed a sweet posie, but the canker-worm is there.”

“That’s just what the minister says is the cause of the yellow melancholy which preys upon her beauty in the bud. But is not she a lovely vision?”

“She certainly is very handsome, every one must allow that,” replied Miss Sibby; “but the ladies that I saw at Leith races, in the first year of the volunteering, they were indeed ladies! such sights are now but seldom seen: really, Mrs. Keckle, if the world con-

tinues to fall off in the looks of women as it has done since my youth, it will be filled with frights long before it's done. But will she not come back? for although I have a pockful of unco's for you, I would fain hold some discourse with that sweet lassie."

"And ye would be surprised if ye did, Miss Sibby; for the minister, who has scrutineezed her parts, says that she has more sense than many he could name."

"For all that, Mrs. Keckle, the bark may be the best of her; for I never heard that your beauties were ever overly laden with sagacity, especially them of the pale and wan order. But I should not think so of her, who is certainly a thing so fine and fair, that she seems more for ornament than use. She is worthy of being set on a drawing-room table, under a glass, for beaux to spy at with their opera-prospects."

Miss Sibby was prevented from proceeding by the appearance of the reverend gentleman from an inner room, his study,—moved to come forth by partly overhearing the subject matter of the conversation.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE Rev. Mr. Keckle, of Greenknowes, was one of those country pastors who, living apart from temptation, acquire a blameless reputation throughout a long life, without the practice of forbearance or effort. He was a middle-aged, corpulently-inclined person, slow and methodical in his speech, not overladen with learning, and who performed his clerical duties with as little sentiment as he consumed his daily bread. All around him, as in the appurtenances of the manse, bore the appearance of an easy, though neglected competency ; and the contour and outline of his figure was in perfect harmony with the untidy regularity which obviously pervaded his household.

The arrival of Julia had, however, on the

present occasion, induced him to make some change upon himself—ordinarily so early in the day he was found much more carelessly dressed. His knees were then unbuttoned, his stockings slovenly drawn up, his feet in slippers formed of old shoes razé, and he wore a silk handkerchief, rather rolled round his neck than tied as a neckcloth, while his thread-bare coat and soup-sullied vest witnessed how little he was in the habit of being molested with morning visitors. But on that day he was decorated in his Sunday suit; his waistcoat, open many buttons, displayed the frill of his shirt in all its amplitude. His affluent cravat was of the brightest purity; his knees and feet were in a due accordance of neatness; his coat still glistened in the seams, as if just from under the tailor's goose; and he swung with an air a Barcelona handkerchief, fresh from the folds and redolent of cedar.

The grand monarque could not in his high and palmy state have received the loftiest lady of Versailles with more benignity than the minister, so in his prime, condescended to perform the homage of his congees to Miss Sibby; who,

unprepared for such elaboration, felt herself perplexed with an awkward alloverishness, doubtful whether his excess meant deference or amusement. But she was not long allowed to wonder; for like others that put on holiday manners, such as those Scotch advocates in London who attempt English, he soon relapsed into his wonted habitude, and restored her comfort, by observing,

That though delighted with his niece, yet she being a metropolitan, it behoved him to treat her with the particularity to which she was accustomed; "the which, Miss Sibeella, to say the truth, is making a fish out of the water of me; and the worst of it is, that I get no thanks for all my pains; as the donsie lassie is so demented with her own cares, that she takes no more notice of my endeavours to please her than if I were in my ordinary deshabelle."

"That is very grievous; and what can be the cause of this great dementing?"

"Love, Miss Sibeella, love."

"We have all in our turn suffered from that sin—and how did it happen, and what was the cause of its coming to pass?"

“ I must confess that her father writes with an obscurity anent that head ; but from the few words I had yesterday with the ledly of Woodhall, it is on account of some gentleman that has been denied his ancestors, and so lost his fortune.”

“ Goodness, Mr. Keckle ! you surprise me—no possible !”

“ The true particulars Mrs. Chrington had not heard, but the Doctor told her, that he was now as far below his daughter, as she was above him in the world ; and therefore he was fain to send her beyond the risk of their for-gathering.—That’s all we have yet heard.”

The mind of Miss Sibby at this began to flicker like summer lightning with conjectures, but suspecting that there might be damage done by speaking out too freely, she uttered only a common-place interjection, and said,

“ Poor creature ! but ye must just treat her with tender-heartedness while she bides with you,” adding with a sigh, “ for it’s a sore thing to have a heart broken by true love. But what I chiefly wanted to confer with you and Mrs.

Keckle about, and which has brought me here so early, is, how we shall deal with the Palmers under their calamity."

"What has befallen them?" cried the minister and his wife at once.

"They too have met with a disappointment; for the Miss Maria that we have all been deaved about, and that was to be married to the grand man, is now married, and turns out to have been neither kith nor kin to them, but the Lady Errington's lawful daughter."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed the reverend gentleman, "how could that by any possibility ever be?"

"I read it in the news last night; and there came a man to me, that had come from Edinburgh on some concern of this affair. Do you know, that but for his going back without calling on them, I would have thought he was Mrs. Palmer's gude-brother, for he was very like her, and has a mole on his left cheek, just on the dividual spot that she has the wart on the right."

"Hooly, Hooly, Miss Sibby!" cried the mi-

nister, "that resemblance is an ill mark in consanguinity ; but what reason have you to suspect that he 's of her propinquity ?"

"Because he was in a boiling consternation, and well do I know, though it may not be told, that they have cause enough among them to be in hot water ; and he was in most imperious haste to see the Laird, so I gave him a glass of wine, and he went straight away back to Edinburgh. Have you not heard any thing of all this, Mrs. Keckle, from Mrs. Palmer, who surely ought to be pitied on her sister's account, which she could not help ?"

The logic of Miss Sibby was at no time of the strictest coherency, and her auditors were in consequence not quite sure at all times if they comprehended her intent and meaning with exact precision ; but slender gleanings of previous intelligence enabled them to follow her on this occasion, though she was more than commonly oracular, and Mrs. Keckle accordingly replied with a shrewdness becoming her station and influence in the parish,

"What you say, Miss Sibby, is very true—our best plan is not to let wot that we have

heard any thing at all till we see what Mrs. Palmer herself tells us;—that is, I mean you and me; for the minister may of his own free will speak in a far off manner to the Master, and the master may give him an inkling. But sure am I there has been a doing that has undone them, though the why and because is still kept out of sight.”

After some further conversation on the subject, all as pertinent, Miss Sibby took her leave, saying how much it would give her pleasure to see them at the Place with their sweet relation, to whom she requested in the most urgent manner that the invitation should be delivered.

Miss Sibby had a just conception of the superiority in degree of the mansion of the principal heritor over that of every other, as well as the manse in the parish, and was ever ready to uphold its renown for hospitality. She then set out apparently to return home, but somehow a shower was visibly coming on, the very sight of which constrained her to turn her steps aside, and seek shelter with Mrs. Palmer. Indeed, to have the exceeding gratification of telling her of the stranger's visit to herself, as well as of the arrival of

Miss Julia at the manse, was as imperative as the lowering rain, to say nothing uncharitable of that natural instigation by which she was actuated, for the airs Mrs. Palmer had assumed when she announced the marriage of her supposed niece—airs which Miss Sibby deemed most unbecoming towards her own aristocracy, and altogether the offspring of an unseemingly upsetting, she was determined to mortify.

It is curious how much the world of senates and cities resemble in their politics the machinations of villages. One would think, in comparing them, that presbyters and prelates were not so unlike as every body knows they are; and that old maids and statesmen in their respective spheres were equally ingenious in their schemes of policy. We are led to make this remark by having heard it said that when Miss Sibby reached the door of the academy-house, where Mrs. Palmer was ready to let her in, she announced herself as her own ambassador, a recondite expression, which if it meant any thing, ought to have put the lady on her guard, as it plainly announced a visit for diplomatical purposes.

CHAPTER XXIII.

“AND so, Mrs. Palmer,” said Miss Sibby, after their reciprocal animadversions on the wintry weather were discharged, “that marriage has taken place, but not just in the way ye thought it was to be, or I greatly misunderstood you. It’s not to Mr. Buxton that the Miss ye thought your niece is married, but to Lord Errington.”

What intelligence Mrs. Palmer had received on the subject has never been disclosed, for she was a prudent woman, and well aware of the practical efficacy of the proverb which predicates, that the least said is soonest mended, but she replied with well collected equanimity; and a visage as serene in all its muscles as a mask,

"There must, indeed, Miss Sibby, have been some defect in your understanding, for what could I say about a niece in the matter? A niece! what niece! I have no niece."

"Does not your sister's dochter stand to you in that degree?"

"My sister's dochter! I have but one sister, and she has but one child, and that child is to a surety not a dochter: you amaze and confound me."

"Was it not, then, her dochter that ye so often told me about—how Lady Errington made much of her, and brought her up, and bred as her own child?"

"Surely in that, if ye ever so understood me, there must have been a wonderful mistake."

"Who, then, is the Miss, if she was not your niece?"

"Nay, that's a question ye need not speer at me; but no doubt she was somebody's bairn; though surely it little concerns us, who dwell in this far-off nook of the world, whether she is or not of the order of Malchesadic, and without father and mother."

"This is most astounding. As I sit here, Mrs. Palmer, you yourself have read me letters from your sister, Mrs. Howard, giving you long paternosters about her sweet dochter, and the love and fondness that her mistress Lady Errington had for 'our amiable child;' these were the very words in her letters."

"You perplex me, Miss Sibby, to hear how you persist, when you are so much in the wrong. My sister, like me, had not a perfect education, and was sometimes not so clear and connect in her letters as she might have been—that's all I can say."

"Mrs. Palmer, had not your sister, Mrs. Howard, a child?"

"She knows best herself; but this I know, Miss Sibby, that you were never in a greater delusion than when ye speak of the Miss that is married to Lord Errington as my sister's dochter—she never was such a thing!"

"It cannot be possible that I have dreamt the same dream more than a hundred times. But surely ye'll not deny another fact, which is, that the young man who was the Lord when the Howards were packed off from the

castle, is their own son ;—what do you say to that ?”

The astonishment of Miss Sibby at the condumacity, as she ever after called it, of Mrs. Palmer, had begun to subside, and drawing upon the magazine of her information, notwithstanding the injunctions which the Laird had laid her under of silence, she launched this irresistible battering-ram, and for a moment exulted in victory. But Mrs. Palmer was only stunned, not subdued, for she soon replied,

“ I see, Miss Sibby, that the best of us are liable to make mistakes, and every body well knows that you yourself have more than once made a fox-paw, which is the only rational way that I can account for the glammour that ye’re under about my sister. Her son, and she has but a son, is, I am credibly informed, a very fine promising young man, who had a college education at the expense of the old Lord, the which I can well discern is the cause of the hoodwinking that blindfolds your judgment.”

“ None of your contempts, Mrs. Palmer ; maybe I know more than you think, and ac-

according to the rigours of the law, the Howards might have been tramping the highway on the salt sea waves to Botany Bay—that's being sib to nobility !”

The Dominie's lady, unable to parry this home thrust, pulled out her handkerchief, and applied it to wipe her eyes, having no other subterfuge at hand, while the redoubted spinner followed up the blow.

“ Had ye met me with a cordiality, Mrs. Palmer, far would it have been from me to nettle you with the truth.”

“ Do you dare, Miss Sibby Ruart, to blacken the character of my sister ?” exclaimed the afflicted lady, starting from her seat, and bravely stamping with her foot, as she flourished her arm on high.

“ A very good morning I wish,” was the cool response of Miss Sibby, rising and moving towards the door ; “ when you are more in your sober senses, Mrs. Palmer, you'll think better of my neighbourly friendship. Did your gude brother call when he was in the parish last night ?”

Mrs. Palmer stood aghast at this keenest

cut of all, for she had received some intelligence from her sister that Howard was about to set off for Edinburgh in pursuit of his son, and the question of Miss Sibby was alarmingly in accordance with the news. She, however, speedily shook off her trance, and laying her hand on Miss Sibby's arm, said in a conciliating tone,

"I doubt, Miss Sibby, that in this business we are both in the wrong."

"I have no doubt that ye are, Mrs. Palmer. To deny that ye ever thought the Miss was your niece, and to pretend that your sister and her gude man are not in a jeopardy, beats print! But by your devices, I can see, Mrs. Palmer, ye're her full sister. Good morning."

In saying so, she opened the door herself, and was on the point of stepping out, when the master met her in the hall. Before he had time to wish her the compliments of the morning, she turned briskly round towards Mrs. Palmer, and smiling with sardonic suavity for a moment, then said to him,

"What will be the effect of all this on the character of the school?"

"What did you say, Miss Sibby?" cried the potentate, paling at her words.

"It's dreadful to think that children may be changed in that way," she continued; "and if it is the way of one sister, there is ill-nature enough in the world to think it not an impossibility to the other;" and her eyes darted forked lightning at the mistress.

This insinuation, with the anger in Miss Sibby's aspect, left the Dominie in no doubt of the thesis on which the ladies had been debating; but he affected not to understand her, nor, indeed, was it very evident that her words were either wise or well chosen, for the boarders at the academy were not such chickens as to be liable to transmutation. However, her ire at the moment had no better materials to explode, and she knew that the reputation of the school was a tender subject with the master. But wherefore attack the innocent man?—he had made no attempt to overreach the memory and sagacity of the maiden lady. This

Miss Sibby herself seemed to feel in a sting of remorse at the moment, for without waiting for a reply, she gave a snorting toss of her head, and opening the hall-door with her own hand, she stepped out with energy, and pulled it behind her, as if the door itself had been instinct with the spirit of animosity.

CHAPTER XXIV.

OUR innate reverence for decorum, and all manner of solemn observances in conduct, would induce us to detain the courteous reader by the button, while we offered a few judicious reflections on the uncomeliness of such heats and spurts of temper as the two ladies had indulged in, during the conversation just described. But among the papers before us, collected with much research for the compilation of this work, we have happened to lay our hand on a letter which well deserves immediate attention. It is from Howard to his wife, and somewhat tends to mar the pleasant vein so congenial to our native and benevolent urbanity. Alas! for the weakness of man, how often do the consequences of guilt assume

in the eyes of those by whom it has been committed, the hues and shapes of misfortune !

“Edinburgh.

“MY DEAREST WIFE,

“I write these few lines with a troubled heart. When I got to Gowans, Mr. Ralston was not at home, being then in Edinburgh, but the lady who was in the house was most civil ; I saw, however, that she had heard something of our adversity, and I learned that the residence of your sister was close by ; which information caused me to come back here ; for had I stopped that night at Greenknowes, I must have seen her, and I need not tell you how little I am inclined to talk to strangers of what we have met with.

“Next morning, on returning to this town, I waited on Mr. Ralston, to represent to him, that the disposition of Miss Julia was none altered by our son’s misfortune ; and that considering how he was a ruined man, he might yet, by marrying her, recover himself. But the gentleman was as unreasonable as Mr. Franks himself could be, and talked to me as

if I had been no better than a criminal. It is a hard thing, dear wife, to be so treated, for having only in an unguarded hour lent ourselves in compassion to our afflicted lady. Surely she will yet do something for us; as she cannot but think that no endeavour was wanting on our part to continue a concealment, which, in her own anger, she disclosed, and which, had she not done, might still have remained a secret.

“You will discern from this that my prospects are at present black and barren, for no doubt Stanley will be governed by the advice of his companions. But surely he will not be void of all natural affection for his parents. If he be, God knows what will become of us! It grieves me to write to you in this downhearted spirit, but I cannot help it. How much has Lady Errington to answer for in bringing us into this affliction! She has been throughout an infatuated woman, and we have only to rue we ever listened to the entreaties of one that held the reins so slack on her own passions. We ought to have been more afraid of her natural rashness; and yet what could we

do better? and surely no parent of a right mind will blame us for seeking an advantage for our child. In that, thank Heaven! we have a consolation; and if Stanley had married Miss Maria, where would have been the wrong at all? It is only because the secret has been told too soon, that it has become an offence against the law; and I often say to myself, had the marriage taken place, and offspring been born of it, would not they have been as righteously of the blood, as if Miss Maria had been a son, and married to one of a race as different from the Erringtons as ours.

“ But what avails all these considerations now? We are standing helpless on the edge of the precipice of destruction, and he, whom the Bible commands to honour his parents, is guilty of regarding us not. Lay not this, however, dear wife, too heavily to heart, for we are not the first of parents who have had disobedient children; nor is our case without hope; for though Stanley, by being used to look down on us as his servants, has not yet a right notion of his duty, he is not wanting in the merit of good qualities, and will by-and-by

come to acknowledge what he owes to the parents that have so suffered for him.

“ Moreover, I am resolved to bring this uncertainty to a point ; I will speak plainly to himself, and take him in some moment of melancholy, when he has a proper sense upon him of the mischief he has brought on us by his obstinacy to Lady Errington. How happy might not we all have been ! I would never have obtruded upon him, as his father, but kept myself aloof from the castle, and in the hill farm that I so often pointed out to you as one of the pleasantest places, spent our days in comfort and peace. But if he still prove rebellious, I will stop in Yorkshire, on my way to London, with my brother, who is naturally a kind-hearted, honest man, well to do in the world, and with his help we shall take a small farm ; for the madness of Lady Errington has so injured us, that we need never hope to get proper places again. She cannot, it is true, say one word to the prejudice of our faithfulness ; and perhaps, after all, will do something good for us, when she is again calm ; but to refer for a character to her, or any of her house, would be to hum-

ble ourselves to those whom we so trusted as to give up our own child, but have found enemies. So I beseech you to keep a good heart, and to remember that the darkest hour is ever before the dawn, as your loving husband does.

“JAMES HOWARD.”

The next letter in the series is of a different description, and from the interesting Julia to Miss Jacintha Brooks. It bears internal evidence of having been written on the same day, probably during the very time, when Miss Sibby Ruart paid her morning visit to the manse, though by the post-mark it was several days later. The date of the letter itself appears to have been forgotten, owing no doubt to the agitation of the fair writer; but the discrepancy in the post-mark may be accounted for, as she was not then aware that there was only a post twice a week from Greenknowes: points of importance like these deserve to have as much light as possible thrown upon them in all authentic narratives.

“ Manse, Green Knowes.

“ DEAREST JACINTHA,

“ Alas, my beloved friend, what a destiny is mine ! With flowing eyes and a throbbing heart I take up my pen ; but what shall it declare ? How shall I gather my fluttering feelings, and describe the sensations of an anguish too intense for words to express ? No, Jacintha, it cannot be ; and in these wild and scattered scrawls you behold the endeavours of a task imposed by the assurance of your sympathy for my sorrow, and to avert a gloom that is deepening on my spirits, like the darkness of night when the sun shines no more on the picturesque objects of the landscape.

“ Of my journey I can only say in a single brief expressive sentence,—it was one tear. The kindness of Mrs. Crighton gave all that consolation could administer to my wounded bosom ; but it was ineffectual ; and the good people, my relations, to whose embraces she has consigned me, are blessed with the milk of human kindness too ; though not so refined and tender in their delicacy as her, still my

drooping heart expands with gratitude for their nursing care.

“ My aunt, the most affectionate of human beings, sat this morning beside me for more than an hour, holding me by the hand, and looking piteously in my face, while from time to time she offered such gentle remonstrances against my sadness as her kind simplicity could suggest. She is indeed the best of women, and though of homely manners, and her hands rough and hardened with domestic economy, she has, nevertheless, the tenderest of hearts. The Reverend Mr. Keckle, an example of learning and piety, takes particular pains for a rural pastor to make himself agreeable, and is certainly one of the most regular-dressed gentlemen that resides in any village. But alas ! Jacintha, when the soul is mournful, what can delight ?

“ I would speak but dare not trust myself, of that fatal topic which lies so near my bleeding heart. Something is already heard of it in this remote region, for on swift and wide wings fly the tidings of disaster. A sister of the woman Howard, that says she is now his mother, is the schoolmistress, as my aunt informs me, at

a place called Semindary, a short walk from the parsonage. Cruel, insensible Fate! to adorn him with perfections among the pinnacles of society, where he had just began to shine, and to cast him down! But tears blind my eyes; I can say no more, for even were it in my power, I hear my aunt parting from her visitor, a maiden lady of great worth, who superintends the menage of a young gentleman, her relation, in the neighbourhood, and doubtless she will soon be again with me, administering her sympathy and love. I must therefore conclude, remaining, ever dearest Jacintha,

“Your affectionate

“JULIA SORN.”

“When you write, be particular and let me know what that creature Caroline Ingleton is about; at one time I did suspect her of planting lures for that heart which is breaking mine. But his Lordship—ah me!—had eyes; and oh how different was his cool, collected, ceremonious bearing towards her, compared with the charming, playful prattle he enjoyed with her who must never think of him any more.”

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CHAPTER XXV.

IT remains exceedingly doubtful if our friend Mr. Franks, in bringing Stanley Buxton to Edinburgh, was actuated by any other intention than merely to remove him from London until the first effervescence of the news concerning his surreptitious birth had subsided. Perhaps he might ; but it is not of importance to determine the point with particular precision. This much, however, is very apparent ; the unhappy discovery had the effect of interfering, among other aristocratic predilections, with the arrangements which our hero had made for going to Paris, and by superseding them became the first taste he received of the privations to which he was thenceforth to be subjected.

Whether the amusements of the Scottish capital be as well fitted to lighten the laden mind as those of the metropolis of France, admits, in the opinion of a few of the population of the general world, of some slight shade of doubt. We willingly, however, acknowledge, that among the Athenians themselves not the minutest particle of difference exists; and upon this subject we have been at some pains to form our judgment with that accuracy, both as to men and things, for which we have at last become so justly and so extensively celebrated.

When the Bastille was in the plenitude of its terrors, Paris had something that could, by ingenuity, be compared with the Maiden Castle. That fortress, however, did not stand upon a rock; had never been the refuge and the birth-place of princes; and moreover, had no such view from its towers or battlements as that which may be contemplated from the King's Bastion. The cathedral of Notre Dame may by some be preferred to St. Giles's, but the intended improvements on that venerable structure, which are to be all of the purest Gothic, will leave no question as to which shall then be

superior. The Register Office, in-as-much as it is crowned with a dome, must be allowed to possess a feature of magnificence in which the Louvre is deficient; and perhaps, in a few immaterial points of splendour, the Thuilleries may have some advantage over the palace of Holyrood. But in historical associations, the murder of Rizzio, whose monumental blood still stains the floor, and all that tradition records of the ill-fated Stewarts, the beautiful Mary, and King George the Fourth's visit,—how immeasurable is the distance between them! As to the opera, and the theatres, in them, we in candour confess, that the palm must be awarded to Paris. But has not Edinburgh in her Parliament House a luxury of entertainment that surpasses them all? What comedy had ever so many repetitions among the Parisians as the puns and bon mots that scintillate like fire-flies round the base of the marble Melville? and if there be the savans of the Institute, has not Edinburgh her wits of the Stove? But such themes and comparisons would be more appropriate in a traveller's guide than here, and therefore we shall pursue

them no farther, but return to the matter more immediately in hand.

Whatever, then, we say, was the motive which brought our friend and our hero to Edinburgh, certain it is, that with all the blandishments of that renowned capital, their domicile might, even for its brief space, have been dull enough, for the courts were not yet in session, had not the state of Stanley Buxton's connexions furnished the whole party with incidents of no ordinary character.

The mood of Howard's mind disclosed in his letter to his wife was but imperfectly described in that self-soothing document. When he felt the ground on which he had for so many years erected his perishable fabric of hopes sliding from under him, he became alarmed and anxious; and there was a wildness in the expedients to which he had recourse, that bespoke at once the extent of his ruin, and his inability to avert it. Of this kind was the rash and irrational journey he had taken to Scotland, to induce Mr. Ralston to intercede with his son to renew his addresses to Miss Julia Sorn,—if so decided an expression

may be applied to an idle flirtation, in which he sometimes had indulged when he chanced to visit the town of Errington, where her father, a wealthy physician, resided.

Why he directed himself to Mr. Ralston has not been explained to us; probably, it was the casual suggestion of those agitated cogitations into which he was forced by his untoward circumstances, assisted by what his wife may have gathered from their son himself, respecting his intended seclusion from London, together with information otherwise obtained, respecting the cause of the young lady's visit to her Scottish relations; at all events, his purpose partook of the disturbance of his mind, and was conceived in a supposed sordidness, which education had either eradicated from Stanley Buxton, or nature had declined to implant; but which, had it not been so, the beauty and merits of another worthier of his discernment would have saved him from obeying.

Disappointed, yea, chastised in his spirit as Howard had been by Mr. Ralston, he still adhered to his crude and loosely imagined

scheme ; for with the determination of a statesman discomfited in one game of diplomacy, he resolved to hazard another. He was not, indeed, a man easily shaken in his intents ; on the contrary, believing that all integrity consisted in being honest according to law, and being literally so, save in the single instance of the fraud in which he had participated with his mistress, he pursued his undertakings with a perseverance worthy of a noble aim.

The same principle of adhesion to his purposes continued with him, even after the disclosure by Lady Errington, although his faculties had been stunned, almost shattered, by the surprise of that event. He was, in truth, a man of stubborn metal, and the ingenuity with which he laboured to repair the injuries he had himself been the cause of, but which by his conduct became new springs of affliction to his unfortunate son, affords a singular exhibition of the entanglements into which perversity may betray. Never justly sensible of his offence, he regarded himself, as it were, entitled to indemnification from the world for what he had lost by the failure of his first machination, and

the victim as an instrument he had a right to employ in seeking it. On this sentiment the habits of his life, arising from his servile condition, had doubtless considerable influence; but still the energy that worked out his purposes would in any state have taught such a man to consider the world as his tools, and others as made only for his use. Yet he was not void of affection, and sometimes he did feel a gleam of that regard for his son, which he represented as the motive by which he was governed, and as the apology that should mitigate the censures he deserved.

This outline of the character of Howard is necessary to understand the course he adopted, when Mr. Ralston was found so little likely to aid his matrimonial machinations; for on retiring from his presence, he was sensible that he had acted too much in the way he was accustomed to do, when calculating on enjoying the Errington domains, and he resolved in consequence to change his deportment, and by humility and contrition, endeavour to regain that consideration he had forfeited. But a sketch of the interview which he had with

Stanley Buxton on the evening of his arrival, will perhaps show the alteration to more effect than any other description. It took place in the evening, and was obtained with some address, for he was well aware that it was the determination of his son to hold no personal intercourse with him; a decision which, if he could have conceived himself guilty of the incurable injury he had done to him, would have changed the hypocrisy of his resolution into the bitterest repentance. But it is these misconceptions of ourselves which make us so often interpret the conduct of others towards us as harsh and unjust, and the repulses of the provocations we give them remembered, yea, even hated, as unmerited injuries.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HOWARD, as soon as he was informed of his son's arrival, wrote to him requesting an interview. The note was couched in such respectful terms that it greatly surprised Buxton ; it was, indeed, in the style of a servant to his master ; and the request was so humbly solicited, that it would have been a wide departure from his own native affability to have refused it, had the cause for the alienation between them been even greater than it was, and the tie by which they were united susceptible of dissolution.

At the time appointed the apparent penitent made his appearance. His son, expecting him, was pacing thoughtfully across the room, with his mind so absorbed that Howard entered

unobserved, and stood for about a minute before attracting attention; when, however, he did, Buxton pointed to a chair for him to be seated, and sat down himself, saying:

"You have requested very earnestly to see me, and I have complied; but I do not discern, Mr. Howard, to what good end these interviews can lead. It would be better that all intercourse ceased between us—I am unable to forget my ruin, and that it is owing to you. Had you brought me up in your own station—— But reproach cannot redeem the errors of the past; you ought, however, to be aware that I am steeped in indigence, with more than the helplessness that waits on it, aggravated by tastes and habits which in my proper sphere could never have been acquired. To what purpose have you wished to see me?"

While Stanley Buxton was thus speaking with visible emotion in detached sentences, and with a saddened voice, Howard resolutely maintained the same calm countenance with which he had entered, and, as if he had only to negotiate the arrangements of some grave agree-

ment, listened to him with attentive silence, answering his questions with the self-collected air of one who had prepared himself.

“ I have not come, Mr. Buxton, to offer any excuse for myself; you have innocently been so wronged, that I dare not remind you of our connection; nor, that although the consequences have been most fatal, the original intention was for your advantage.”

“ Say for your own, Howard, for the rights of a parent gave you no privilege to seek advantage for your son at the hazard of all that in life could constitute the worth of it to him. Duty should have taught you to protect me; but you exposed me, and we are now reaping the consequences. I am grieved, Mr. Howard, that I cannot repress these feelings—I wish you had spared me to another time. My sense of the disasters under which I suffer is yet too keen to be discussed with you; it is as if my mind were skinless, and I am ever prone to complain of an irremediable wound.”

“ You think too bitterly of our misfortune, my son,—take not my freedom amiss, compose

yourself, we cannot loosen the cord that binds us together."

"Alas! in that lies much of the calamity."

"Bear with me, Mr. Buxton; what you blame me for was but a father's fault. In what are you yourself less than you would have been, had your birth been different?"

"I might, perhaps, have had an honest man for my father."

"Honest! Mr. Buxton. But you think yourself entitled to reproach me, and I submit."

"Well, well," exclaimed the other, becoming visibly disturbed; "let us avoid that subject, if we can—Why have you desired this interview?"

"I would," replied Howard diffidently, "do a true parent's part."

"In what way?"

"By suggesting to your consideration a chance that has cast up, by which you have it in your power to lessen our misfortune."

"How? speak—why do you hesitate? is it by another stratagem?"

These words, and the hurried and varying

tone in which they were uttered, smote the very heart of Howard ; his complexion fled, his lips grew pale and quivered, and his eyes glistened with tears.

“ It is cruel to cleave a broken heart,” said he ; “ reflect, young man.”

“ Young man !” echoed Buxton, starting up and forgetting for a moment their connection. Then suddenly recollecting himself he immediately resumed his seat, adding in great agitation,

“ You cannot wonder that I sometimes forget who I am. There has not yet been time to wipe away the habits of the past. But proceed, proceed ; what would you advise ? I must endure the advice of my father. He was long esteemed a worthy man.”

In giving vent to the softened feeling couched in the latter expression, he turned aside his head and drew his hand over his eyes.

“ Notwithstanding all that has taken place,” said Howard with firmness, and in full command of himself, “ Dr. Sorn, as I have cause to believe, would still consent to your union with his daughter.”

Our hero, who had leant his forehead on his hand, looked up at these words, and Howard continued.

“ Since the untoward discovery she has drooped in her health, and is now in Scotland with her friends.”

“ Indeed ; where ? ”

“ In the neighbourhood of Mr. Ralston’s residence. The Doctor is rich, she is his only child, and a marriage with her would——”

“ What would it do, Mr. Howard ? ”

“ Appease some of those apprehensions which make our condition at present so alarmingly wretched.”

The unconscious Machiavelli having thus discharged himself of the burden that weighed upon his heart, looked more familiarly than he had hitherto ventured to do, and beheld with evident satisfaction something like the dawn of a smile brightening on the features of his son, as he replied :

“ So this is what you advise, and to deliver this you followed me from London.”

“ The chance, Mr. Buxton, is a blessing.”

“ Is it ? ”

“ If quickly seized, it will be the saving of us all—your mother—”

“ I would think of her as such ; perhaps I shall by and by, for as my Nurse she was so, and the only parent I have ever had.”

No sooner had these words been uttered, especially the last sentence, which breathed the spirit of tenderness, than our hero rose from his seat, and having walked to a distant part of the room he turned abruptly round, and said with a hard and emphatic accent,

“ Mr. Howard, may I ask how it has happened that you bring this advice to me ? When you urged me to accept Maria, there was some reason in your argument, though it was offensive in our then respective circumstances ; but I see no propriety in this.”

“ As your father—”

“ Father ! In what are you my father ?—How have you earned the privilege to put on such authority ?”

“ Then, as your friend, alarmed at your necessities, I would entreat you to think how easily they may be overcome.”

“ Mr. Howard, you push the claim of nature

too far, which you yourself abandoned at my birth; be not therefore surprised that I reject your admonition as obtrusive—that I account all control, counsel, and affection which you may now resume, a usurpation—or, in fitter phrase, a theft and filching back of the things you gave away. But I will endeavour to have some temperance in my answer, and in giving you a reason, show a better sense of filial respect than is due to one who still thinks that his victim should be his slave. My own affections are engaged, and were they not—but I will not disparage the fond weak girl, who so prefers me only for myself, making, perhaps, thereby her own weakness the more palpable.”

“And shall your mother, I say nothing of myself, be again sacrificed to your self-will? You little know the pang a parent suffers in the rebellion of a child. This obstinacy will be to her as the anguish of another birth. Reflect on what you are, and to what estate, on your account, she has been cast, and well consider what is yet in your power.”

“Enough, Mr. Howard. I will remember what you have said—I will think on it—it

shall not be forgotten. Tremendous and incomprehensible destiny ! why is my heart thus clutched ? Like the milkless bosom of a childless stepmother, tugged by a brat she hates, so are your claims of parentage to me. Go ! leave me, unhappy man ; you have already with unmitigable bane, mixed and made loathsome as the lees of wormwood all that was malmsey in the cup of life. Begone, I say, for you have stirred the sin that 's in my nature, and fearful thoughts of guilt against myself, like Herod's worms, crawl and uncoil themselves in my unwholesome spirit !"

This violent burst of passion amazed the culprit ; for the restraint which custom and resolution had enforced on the manners of Buxton, deceived him with respect to the strength of his feelings, and during the whole of their interview he had never once imagined that such a volcano was raging in his bosom. He looked at him ; he shrunk as he approached ; and there was a horror in his ears, as if a dreadful being had boded the possibility of witnessing on the spot some inexpressible crime ; for so he interpreted the frightful expressions that had

escaped in the frenzy of the moment. He then lifted his hat, which he had placed on the floor beside the chair on which he had been sitting, and seemed inclined to speak, but the other, who was now hastily pacing the room to and fro, signified by an impassioned wave of the hand to be silent and retire.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BUT after all, we do believe that mankind are not half so bad as the virtuously invidious allege. When we consider that the wise and enlightened are the few of the world, who knows but that, in the general system and frame of things, the guilty minority are like those who are in opinion, the chiefest ministrants of good. This consideration should therefore teach us to be compassionate, if not absolutely indulgent, to the errors of our brethren. There is besides another and a stronger reason. Every man knows his own mind and conscience best, and rare they are among the children of humanity who suspect themselves of sinful deeds and intents, whatever may be the comments of the world concerning their actions.

The revengeful, as in common parlance one class of the bad is called, may have only a sense of justice nicer than that of those who constructed the laws. They perhaps find that custom and statute do not reach their particular case and cause of resentment, and therefore conceive themselves justified by the negligence of legislation, and the imperfections of the social state, to take the administration of punishment into their own hands. And what species of imputed offence may not be as distinctly traced to natural sentiment, as those which, in our ignorance of the issue of the tendency of human affairs, we pronounce virtuous? In a word, we are true believers in the notion, that few men have ever very clear ideas of their own delinquency; and that, on the contrary, the worst of the species are marvellously disposed to assure themselves in their darkest malefactions that

“ Their stars are more in fault than they.”

videlicet;—the reflections with which Howard softened to himself the hue of his offences. But to our tale.

During the interview between Stanley Bux-

ton and his father, Mr. Franks and the kind-hearted Ralston were engaged in a conversation respecting the former, the substance of which the Laird felt himself under some obligation of communicating soon after to the discreet superintendant of his household, Miss Sibby Ruart, to prepare her for the visit of a stranger she had little expected it would become her lot to entertain at the Gowans.

“Edinburgh.

“DEAR COUSIN,

“YOU may expect me with Mr. Franks and his friend in the course of a few days. The reasons which have induced me to invite them I shall tell you when we meet. But in the mean time I cannot do more to interest you in the unfortunate Mr. Buxton, than by stating that his situation is greatly distressing beyond what we had imagined ; for although his successor, Lord Errington, wrote so kindly to assure him of his friendship, he has as yet done nothing for him, and the poor fellow is dependent on the generosity of old Mr. Franks. It is, however, our intention to persuade him

to address his Lordship as soon as his mind has acquired some degree of composure, and I trust, with the help of your good nursing, it will be obtained at the Gowans.

“ Before he came to Edinburgh, Franks says that his mind was evidently healing, but the very evening of his arrival he had an interview with Howard, which proved exceedingly distressing; for, not the least of the losses he has sustained, arises from the necessity of foregoing an attachment he had formed for a young lady, exasperated by a proposition that his father has suggested of marrying another, with a considerable fortune, with the consent of her father, who will, notwithstanding what has happened, bestow on him her hand. This mark, however, as you will call it, of a favour to true love, he rejects, merely because he does not like her. Did you ever hear any thing so unreasonable? when, by being a dutiful child, he might so easily again make himself a rich man. Knowing, too, that he has no chance of getting his own sweetheart, who was no doubt a lady of degree; as you would say,—Don’t you think it very romantic?

“In short, Miss Sibby, this affair has as many queer things in it as you have in your trash bag, and chiefly of a melancholy cast. I really know not what he will do if Lord Errington does not help him. He has talents, I am quite convinced, of a far higher kind than he got credit for at college, and were he once enabled to make them known, I am sure he would become distinguished. But his education, I fear, has made him one of those who know what should be done better than how to do it.

“I think the two pups for Captain Swagger may be taken from Sal and sent to him. Tell Dick that I have promised the female with the brown ear to Mr. Franks to go to London, and that he may do with the remainder of the litter as he likes; but they must be all cleared off before my return; for Sal will be a Niobe for her family Heaven knows how long, and I have causes enough for the heart-ache just now, without listening to the woowooing of her complaints.

“Yours affectionately,

“A. RALSTON.”

“N.B. You had as well get old John Coulter

to assist in the stable while my friends are with me, as Dick will be wanted in the house."

As Miss Sibby, from her stern controversy with Mrs. Palmer, had not yet made any attempt to conciliate her again, the receipt of this important epistle was a severe trial; for nothing did she enjoy so much as giving and receiving news, no matter whether sad or gay; and the Dominie's lady, she always acknowledged, was one of the most conversable on all subjects within the bounds of the parish. Mrs. Keckle, to be sure, was pretty well, but not so discerning in her comments, and at this time she was taken up with the love-sick maiden, and could talk of nothing but the beauty and accomplishments of that amiable young lady, and how she knew the secret of painting japan tea-chests, made of fir boards, to say nothing of making bell-ropes, and the more refined art of drawing pictures with houses, and hills, and cows in them, together with a geni that she had for sentimental reflections, in the shape of verses. However, it happened that the even-

ing was drizzily when the letter arrived, and Miss Sibby had in consequence the night and the counsel of her pillow to assist her in determining what she ought to do, as the most effectual means of circulating the tidings she had received ; and what these able counsellors advised it is our duty to relate.

After having well considered all the circumstances of the case as they respected the several parties, and having also some suspicion that Miss Julia Sorn at the manse was, or might be, one of the dramatis personæ—although her Scottish notions, as a Laird's cousin, could not very well comprehend how a physician's daughter was ever likely to be deemed a fit match for a Lord—she resolved to keep a calm sough, and say nothing direct on the subject. She did not restrict herself entirely to silence certainly, but conscious that in her flicker with Mrs. Palmer she had shown more of the cat-in-the-bag than the Laird would perhaps approve, she therefore resolved to be thus prudent ; and in cases of a similar kind, we would recommend her example to all our fair acquaintance.

The character of Miss Sibby was of the mixed sort ; she had many active virtues and kind qualities ; was shrewd to an admired degree in the management of her household, and her only blemishes were an insatiable curiosity, and a delight in relating her discoveries, quite equal to the gratification she enjoyed in making them. She was indeed a biform character ; and considered with reference to her domestic phase, there was no luminary of equal splendour above the horizon probably of the whole parish, but farther and wider than we can tell. The defects, however, to which we have alluded, were as the markings on her disk, and there were not wanting among her neighbours discreet persons, who discovered in them not only the delinquent woodman with his dog and hatchet, but likewise the bundle of sticks. In short, though in her proper sphere Miss Sibby was a bright and shining light, she had her specks and spots, and was in consequence not estimated at her full worth, especially by some of those who entertained a just animosity to the foibles or merits of their friends.

Besides the rowel in the side of her garrulity

that the Laird's letter was to the communicative spinster, she had another cause of molestation at this time, equally annoying. By no address could she ascertain whether Mrs. Palmer was in correspondence with Mrs. Howard, or was as fully informed as herself of the retributive misfortune that had overtaken them. This was certainly a great hardship, and the more so, as but for an accident that had befallen Nanse Gather, there would have been no difficulty in the case. Nanse, however, who wore hoggins, with her feet bare, happened one evening to knock her toe against a stone, in such a manner as to cripple herself, which obliged her to find a substitute for some time. This substitute was what is called the poor scholar of the academy, and completely under the rule and power of the Dominie, the viceroy over him and his spouse; but even had the boy not owed such special allegiance, he was one of those knavish varlets that see at a glance into the bosoms of those who think themselves exceedingly wise; and Miss Sibby, on the first attempt to sift him, confessed to herself that

he was the most impossible creature she had ever met with.

When he brought the newspaper by the preceding post, he flung it to Dick the groom in the most reckless manner, without saying more than "catch," which invocation of unsatisfactory brevity Dick obeyed, and in consequence the lady had no opportunity of speaking to him, till that night on which he brought the Laird's epistle—postage being required, he brought it to the door, and delivered it to Dick, who carried it in. Miss Sibby, having it still in her left hand, with her right scrambling among keys and halfpence in the bottom of her pocket, came out herself to pay him.

"Have ye not another letter for the Gowans, Jemmy?" said she: "Surely there ought to be another; let me look among the others."

"Na, that would be more than my head's worth," replied the boy, "were I to forget myself, and give the mail up, either to you, Miss Sibby, or any other criminal robber."

"That's a trust-worthy laddie, but as Nanse Gather cannot read write, I'm so used to her

way, that I just spoke by an accident. This is frae Edinburgh, are ye quite sure ye have none from London?"

"Did ye expect any, Miss Sibby?"

"Generally when Mrs. Palmer gets a London letter, we get one too; but ye'll have none by course for her the night."

"I have four letters for the academy-house, and among them there may be one for the Mistress."

"Dear me, four letters! that's a swarm indeed! There has no doubt been a West India packet, and they'll be from the parents of the tawny laddies—Look if they be?"

"Od's sake, Leddy, but ye're a corkscrew," replied the boy, "ye should na, however, keep me clishmaclavering here, but pay the postage and let me go; for as sure's death I am real honest, and would rather break my leg than break a seal; for I was well schooled in that by Nanse, who told me that it's the very height of treason to do so, save when the letter has three seals—then it may be opened, because none but the King and the Queen have a right

to get a letter with three seals ; and ye weel ken that ye'r no' the queen yet, Miss Sibby."

"Thou's a thumert of a wean, to say so."

At these words the boy turned round, and was moving off, when she called after him, not to mention what had passed to the mistress.

"Ye may be sure, Miss Sibby," was his pawkie answer, "if I could tell a lie, I would say how ye took every letter, and squeezed it open, till ye could spy what was in its inside."

"Thou's an auld farent todd," said Miss Sibby, "the which betokens an untimely end ;" and so saying she returned into the house.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WE hope it has been made sufficiently palpable that the condition of Stanley Buxton was one of peculiar unhappiness. Unless this has been so, it will not be easy to make the reader aware of his desolate state, nor the force of temptation by which he was environed in his fall.

It would not be easy to imagine among the possible vicissitudes of life, a condition than his more forlorn, to which blame did not attach. The sins of his father, according to the decalogue, were visited upon him. He was not merely cast from a high sphere, but obliged to inherit the stains and taints of the meanest; and in himself the purity of his mind remained unsullied, save in those secret and occasional

repinings and grudges which it is ever the fatal efficacy of misfortunes derived from the fault of others to excite. It is indeed the effect of such adversity to corrode the heart, which if it happen at any time to temper to firmness, it never fails to impair in its generous qualities : as the heated iron when plunged in cold water is hardened into steel, and prepared for aggressive purposes.

That the ruin into which he had been so disastrously cast worked to its natural issue in his bosom, cannot be denied. The feeling he suffered towards his father, an antipathy the reverse of filial reverence, was unquestionably to be attributed to this source ; whether it was susceptible of extenuation, or was justified by the circumstances in which he found himself shipwrecked, the reader will best determine for himself, but of its existence there could be no doubt, even though he had affected to conceal it ; for often by inadvertent expressions, in moments when the subject did not appear by the tenour of the conversation to be present, he would betray how largely it constantly occupied his mind. These stings of anguish startled

him unawares, like those shooting pangs to which valetudinarians are sometimes liable, without exterior indications of disease. Perhaps, however, the cause of these might not have been suspected, but for that unconscious inquisitive scrutiny which Mr. Franks, even in the midst of the most apparent carelessness, was ever practising on his friends, as well as on all with whom he happened to meet. The result of that scrutiny led, on the evening prior to the party leaving Edinburgh for the country, to a singular conversation between him and the Laird, while their unhappy companion chanced to be absent.

“Do you know, Ralston,” said he, “that I begin to be more grieved at a change on Buxton, than I can well express. It comes no doubt from what has happened to him, but it is an effect I had not anticipated.”

“He is undoubtedly altered,” replied the Laird; “he becomes every day more shy and thoughtful, but it does not surprise me.”

“It is not that I allude to; he seems to be pleading to himself in favour of his father, a sure sign that his aversion, if I may use the

expression, is increasing; and those, 'God help me's,' which so unexpectedly escape him, are the utterance of pains that he fears he cannot withstand."

"This is one of your fancies, Franks," said the Laird.

"Nay, it is not so; for when I have noticed sudden exclamations of that kind from others, and have afterwards endeavoured to learn the cause, I have uniformly found, though the precise cause could not be fathomed, that dilapidation in conduct or in fortune soon followed. To the latter poor Buxton is I fear not liable. He has, however, undoubtedly a noble innate fortitude, and may obtain the mastery of his circumstances; but have we not heard of manly spirits, who after a brave wrestle have at last been subdued by Fate! There is an alloy as influential in the deterioration of the precious metals as the philosopher's stone is in the transmutation of the baser into gold; and we are surer of its effects in experiment—Vexation is that alloy to the stuff of the heart."

"Don't be mystical, Harry; explain your-

self ; you disturb me : can you imagine it possible he will ever settle into a vagabond ?”

“ I would not say so even to you, were I assured of it ; he however thinks of things that make him afraid of his own frailty.”

“ But,” said the Laird cautiously, “ it may be an error in philosophy to represent all men as alike in similar circumstances. Though you may have observed a falling off in some men who indulged in those apparent aimless exclamations, it may not be a fair inference to allege that the expressions are uniformly the forerunners of such melancholy effects. We have all our intervals of lassitude, during which the merest trifles of duty are felt as grievous tasks. You do not hear me, Franks ?”

“ With three ears I would if I had them, Ralston, for you have opened to me a new vein of reflection. You say right ; there may be an error in what we have been hitherto taught to believe as an indisputable truth ; for the mark of individuality impressed on the forehead of every human being shows that there must be an error in the dogma, which asserts that in similar circumstances all men act alike. No one

who has ever looked about him in the world can assent to it, for men in themselves are not alike, and that which constitutes individuality must ever prevent them, in the same circumstances, from acting with that uniformity of conduct which we are taught to believe they will and must do."

At this crisis of their discussion Buxton came into the room, and Mr. Franks said abruptly to him,

"You have come at an auspicious moment to solve a metaphysical knot, which Ralston and I have been endeavouring to loosen."

"Have I then been the subject?"

Without making any immediate answer, Mr. Franks glanced his eyes expressively at the Laird, as Buxton turned round to lay his hat and gloves on a table, and then added,

"You have, indeed; we have been wondering why it is you appear to be always thinking of yourself. Your question just now is a proof of it; could not a metaphysical question occur between him and me without having reference to you?"

"With all your accuteness, Franks, you

have, however, made a little mistake; I think not of myself, but too much perhaps of my situation; I grope in the dark; I can lay hold of nothing, and I begin to be afraid."

"Afraid, Mr. Buxton?" said the Laird compassionately: "though you have been unfortunate, have you not kind friends, and your own superior talents."

"But I am incapable of resolution; I know what should be done, but the will is wanting; and a fallacious hope that what has happened will yet be as a dream, dissolves the power I should exert. There is a wicked spell in the reflection that I can never more be otherwise than as I am."

Mr. Ralston sat silent, but Mr. Franks, whom greater intimacy had rendered more familiar, said impressively,

"Are you aware, Buxton, to what brink that despondency is leading you?"

"I am," was the emphatic answer: "but the hope to which I have alluded holds me back. Yet wherefore do I yield to it; for to the very sight and test of my reason it is an illusion as empty as the northern dawn that never comes

to day. In sooth, good gentlemen, would I were rid of these anxieties, even at the cost of that for which we endure all cares. I have been bred and nourished to be useless alike to the world and myself. In my estimate, life stands not higher than in the soldier's on the field of battle, and it is as ready to be given up."

"Has any thing occurred, Mr. Buxton, to make you thus so much more depressed since you went out?" inquired Mr. Ralston, with a degree of emotion, that not only affected his voice, but at once blanched and saddened his countenance,

"Yes," was the reply, "yes;" and turning round to Mr. Franks, he added with a sardonic gaiety, that was more solemn than awe, "I have reasoned myself into the only conclusion which my case admits of."

"I perceive you think so," was the answer; "for those who have determined the value of life with reference only to its ills, are not far from being criminals to themselves. They are but fools who are so without advantage—What shall you gain by your conclusion?"

"Deliverance from evil," was the answer.

“What then,” cried Mr. Franks, deeply agitated; “what is it then that makes calamity of so long life? But that if in shuffling off this mortal coil by our own act, we should find, instead of the relief we expected, only behind the curtain abortions in the purposes of Providence, the consequences of our deed, and more dreadful to witness than the ills we thought to fly from.”

“Then you think, Franks, my conclusion is to risk that. You are mistaken; your philosophy and metaphysics are both at fault: I have but convinced myself of a homely truth, that what comes of Nature, or to speak more worthily, what Heaven bestows either of good or evil, the responsibility of the effect lies not with us, and therefore should be endured. The deformed may desire himself transformed, but though he were ten times in hideousness an Esop, would he ever dream of suicide? No, my friend; I have thought better on't; and the unsightly features and hunch-back of my destiny are but things of a deformity as innocent as those of birth. I will no longer repine at the

errors of my parents, nor meditate how the birds and beasts without regret forsake their nests and lairs, but conform to what is visibly ordained. I intend to see my father to-morrow, and it may not be for the last time."

CHAPTER XXIX.

AFTER some farther conversation, in which our hero explained the motives and reasons that had enabled him to overcome his perhaps correct repugnance at the deception to which his father had been a party, he then told them, that in reflecting on the indissoluble nature of the filial tie, he found himself under the strongest obligation to forget all he could of the past, and to strenuously engage in the profession he had proposed to himself.

“ I will not conceal from you, Franks,” said he, “ that I may have sometimes trifled with your generous feelings, when, during the controversy in my bosom, I encouraged your metaphysical ingenuity to attempt conjectures that could only afflict you ; but, pardon me, I can no

longer fall into the same error ; I am no longer the same man. You seem surprised that I should have become changed so suddenly, but I apprehend self-conviction is always instantaneous."

"I think much of your agitation," replied Mr. Franks, "arose from some reluctance you have felt at the idea of applying to Lord Errington."

"It did," was the answer ; as if to intercept him from proceeding to a disagreeable topic—"on that point I am now settled."

"You cannot then avail yourself of his friendship too soon," said Franks.

"It will save your best friends from much uneasiness," added the Laird. Buxton, however, only smiled at their observations, and added, looking earnestly at Mr. Franks,

"Have you really imagined that I could apply to Lord Errington, on whom I have no claim but his own spontaneous offer—one to whom, though innocently, I have been so long the cause of much privation? Yes, gentlemen ; in coming to a rational determination with respect to my other troubles, my decision as to

his kindness I hope has not been unwise. I will not reject what he may be pleased to give; I will do him the justice to remind him of his promise. I must forego now the enjoyments of my rank;" the expression escaped him, but in the moment it was detected, and he added, smiling, "it is a humiliating thing to fall into such mistakes, but the ideas which give rise to them will be gradually weeded, though time is requisite. Some little money," he resumed, "will at present be required, and for that I must be indebted to your father, for I do not despair that the road to success has been closed against my endeavours. You see in this determination the simple, and, I trust, the rational course of the life I intend to pursue. Let us, therefore, studiously throw all the fallacies of the past into oblivion, and think of what has taken place but as the incidents of a drama."

These sentiments were in unison with the opinion which his two friends had formed of his good sense, and the character of the pride which had been pitched in his previous station. They both felt themselves disentangled from many perplexities, and openly congratulated

him on the assurance of his future eminence, derived from the manliness of his intention ; and they separated for the night in better accord with each other and the world, than they had been for some time.

In the morning Howard was sent for, and to their common surprise he was found to be in waiting, an incident which occasioned some embarrassment when he was announced ; but Buxton, who was now awakened to that alacrity of mind which he had received from nature, and which had been only stunned, not removed by his misfortune, speedily extricated them all.

“ I have sent for you,” said he to his father, “ that this unhappy embarrassment may be ended ; my friends here know with what difficulty I have brought myself to this resolution, and all I desire from you is, that we speak of the past no more.”

“ I rejoice to hear you have come to consider your situation so reasonably,” replied Howard ; who, incapable of conceiving that he could be actuated by any other motive than the chance of being accepted by Miss Julia Sorn, supposed himself invited to a conference

on that subject, and added under this misconception, "it is indeed the only step you can take, and the easiest to replace you in good society."

Ralston and Franks exchanged significant glances, on observing that Buxton's colour fled, as he said with an accent of alarm,

"Of what do you speak?"

The sordid parent, without heeding the question, said, "I have the best assurances, that so far from the Doctor being opposed to it, he will—"

"Well, well," interrupted our hero impatiently, "we have had enough of that already. It was not on that business I desired to see you"—and recovering from his momentary agitation, he held out his hand and added, "Let us be henceforth father and son, as we ought to be;" but his voice faltered as he subjoined, "it will be my endeavour—"

Howard was sensible that he had committed some mistake, but not perceiving exactly in what it consisted, returned to the subject he had so unexpectedly introduced, saying,

"It will rejoice your mother's heart, and

relieve her from those terrors of want which have, ever since the fatal discovery, filled her pillow with thorns."

A flash of indignation gleamed for a moment on the darkening visage of the disappointed Buxton, but with a strong effort of his understanding, he recovered himself from the feelings which had almost acquired an ascendancy over him, and said with firmness and self-possession,

"We a little misunderstand each other. In wishing for a reconciliation, I would speak on no other subject, but only of those things which may help our mutual good will. What thinks my mother, now that she has had time to reflect, how little I could comprehend those bursts of anxiety with which she sometimes addressed me?"

"At first she suffered greatly, as might be expected from a weak woman beset with irremediable adversity; but she is again calmer, and could this marriage be accomplished—"

"Man, speak not to me of that!" was the exclamation that silenced the infatuated delinquent; and in giving vent to the excitement of

the moment, Buxton hastily turned round and walked to the end of the room.

Mr. Franks interposed.

"It will be better, Howard," said he, "that you retire for a time, and consider what Mr. Buxton has said; you see it grieves him to harp so on that marriage. Think, that not the least of the misfortune into which he has been brought by your indiscretion, to use no lighter name for it, is the hope that it has for ever blasted."

"I meant no harm," was the answer; "I have been always only too anxious for his good; and surely, Sir, he is not now in a condition to be romantic with his affections. He cannot afford it."

Mr. Franks turned from him without affecting to conceal his disgust, and our worthy friend the Laird, who had been an astonished spectator, came forward, but he only increased the disorder that had so marred the harmony intended.

"Mr. Howard," said he, "I beseech you to allow us to have some conversation by ourselves with Mr. Buxton; you see how distressed he is."

"I'm sure that I have only advised him for his good, and this is not the treatment a parent should receive from a son," replied Howard.

"No," cried the agitated victim aloud, "but it is such as you deserve from yours.—Oh, gracious Nature! with thy gentle hand keep down and soothe these tigers at my heart;—away, and leave me, dreadful man! There is a devil in the plausibility with which you look upon the work that you have made. Begone! avoid me! lest I shake off the sacred and restraining power that holds me from a crime!"

"Has he been often in such consternation?" said the amazed Howard to Mr. Franks, as Buxton again turned abruptly from him, and with an imprudent familiarity, as it seemed on the occasion, notwithstanding their connexion, he hastily approached and touched his son on the shoulder, who instantly, as if moved by the sting of a reptile, started forward, and for a moment raising his hand in a menacing attitude, said disconsolately, his anger instantly subsiding,

"I thought you were my servant."

The grief with which this was uttered greatly affected all that heard it. Mr. Franks, whose sensibility was the liveliest, burst into tears; the Laird moved forward with an amazed composure, and taking hold of the afflicted man by the hand, said with a look and tone of indescribable sympathy, "Mr. Buxton!"—while Howard, his visage flashing with anger, glanced behind him as he quitted the apartment, and muttered,

"This is to have had a Lord for a son!"

CHAPTER XXX.

NEXT morning, when the travellers were on the point of embarking in a post-chaise for the Gowans, Mr. Franks received a letter from London. Seeing the superscription was in the writing of his father, he was surprised; not being aware that the old gentleman could have any occasion to address him; and still more so, when on opening it he found an urgent request for him to return immediately to town. No explanation of the cause was given for which he was wanted, nor did the letter contain a single word on any other subject; but this brevity and singleness were in themselves impressive, and he begged his friends to postpone their journey for a short time, till he could learn what had been the news by that morning's mail.

At this period the French were at their busiest mischief in the north of Germany, and their operations materially disturbed the wonted regularity in the transactions of the merchants. Messrs. Franks, Bremen, and Co. were among those whose interests were the deepest affected; but their long established credit and great opulence had not been essentially impaired. They had, however, received some confidential intelligence concerning an intention to issue the afterwards celebrated Berlin decree, a measure which they foresaw would shake the foundations of their house, and in consequence the old gentleman resolved to summon his son home, apprehensive that it might be necessary to make some decisive arrangement to anticipate the event. It was only his characteristic prudence as a merchant that had prevented him from explaining the cause, while he must have been sensible that his imperative request could not but produce an extraordinary excitement.

When young Franks had ascertained that there was no public intelligence of importance by the mail, he was disposed to proceed with

his friends, especially as he found that he might be in London without the loss of more time than a single day; but Buxton, who felt indebted both to the munificence of the father and to the son's friendship, would not hear of any delay on his account, and thus it came to pass that they were separated in an equally sudden, unforeseen, and equivocal manner. Equivocal, because the cast of recent incidents had rendered our hero extremely sensitive to the slightest apparent occurrence which his morbid imagination could twist into an inimical bearing upon his own altered state; and the effect of the rumination to which this gave rise, made him, during the first stage of the journey, thoughtful, almost morose.

At first he had not been particularly sensible to the change which had befallen him; it touched his reason more than his feelings; but every day the height from which he had descended, though he had come down with honour and gracefulness, became more and more palpable to himself. Sagacity and experience, however, had made him jealous of those inflexions in deference to which all of an unde-

terminated station are liable, and he grew apt to fancy, where he observed any falling off in the observance of the etiquettes to which he had been accustomed, that the respect he had formerly enjoyed was bestowed on his rank alone—one of the most humiliating notions that can enter the mind, or receive warranty from outward circumstances; for we all believe ourselves beloved and esteemed for qualities in ourselves, and nothing can be so mortifying as to discover, or to imagine we have discovered, that it is some circumstance either of connexion or of fortune, and not the qualities of our own character, which gives us consequence.

It would serve no agreeable purpose to palliate the conclusion to which Stanley Buxton arrived, in reasoning with himself concerning the recall of Franks, who was so truly his friend. The infirmity arose from anxiety; the head, and not the heart, was in fault; but he inferred that it was solely because of him—his friendlessness, that the old gentleman had thought their intimacy quite enough. Hence the origin of that ungainly sentiment in his reflections which

seemed so morose, and which, perhaps, he felt as such.

After remaining many miles abstracted and silent, perhaps even sullen, Buxton turned to the Laird, who was calling up and investigating all sorts of conjectures which might tend to explain his taciturnity, and said,

“What think you of this abrupt recall?”

“I pray God,” replied Ralston, “that there may be nothing wrong with the credit of his father’s house. But the French have of late been at such devilry in the north of Germany, that nothing of an evil kind seems improbable to their conduct.”

The idea had never once presented itself to the mind of Buxton, absorbed in himself, and yet no egotist, and he was rebuked by the generosity in the apprehension of Ralston; after looking at him sometime steadily, he said,

“Truly the worst of misfortune is the bad thoughts which it suggests to us of others;” and tenderly remembering the affectionate sympathy which Franks had evinced throughout the

whole of his singular distress and perplexity, he fell into a fit of musing melancholy.

"But I may be able," said he after some time, "to think more correctly by and by. I despise myself for imagining that I was so much an object of interest, when the state of the times present so many other causes more feasible: you are right, Ralston, it is not mine, but their own affairs, which have prompted the urgency of the old gentleman's letter. How is it that I could not reflect on it as you have done?—I, that have so much more cause to do so—for it would be to me at this time a second ruin, were aught to frustrate the confidence I repose in the friendship of the open-hearted Franks."

In the mean time the Laird's household were preparing to receive him and his friends; but Miss Sibby Ruart did not count on their arrival before a late hour, expecting they would dine by the way. This error in her calculation occasioned some of those minor afflictions to which country gentry are now and then exposed.

As the strictest economy distinguished her

household management, she availed herself of this supposed arrangement to display both her hospitality and thrift, and, accordingly, she invited Mr. Keckle, the Minister, and his wife, with their daffodil niece,—as, by the by, she very improperly called Miss Julia—to an early tea. The road being heavy between the Gowans and the Manse, and the night damp and lowering, she expected they would depart with the young moon's light, and that the candles which had served them would in consequence do for her kinsman and his guests. It was not every evening she ordered the drawing-room to be lighted, but expecting Mr. Buxton, who had been a peer of the realm, she could not entirely divest herself of a notion that he still retained some odour of his former dignity, and should be treated with becoming consideration; six lights, in consequence, were kindled, two on the mantel-shelf, and two on each of the card-tables, instead of the Darby-and-Joan pair which commonly illuminated the parlour. But with due caution, she said nothing of the strangers expected, aware of Buxton's relationship to Mr. and Mrs. Palmer, and not exactly knowing if

he intended to make himself known either to them or to Miss Julia, who loved him for himself, as she pathetically told her aunt, nor deemed him less worthy than when he was a Lord.

It thus happened, owing to the sloughy roads, that the party from the Manse were rather later than desirable, and the travellers, by not stopping to dine, were a couple of hours too early. The Laird was, however, pleased, as the chaise drove up the avenue, to see the mansion gaily shining like Alloway Kirk, where the witches held their waltz, and to be received by Dick in his best livery as he alighted.

When, however, the arrival was announced, Miss Sibby was thunderstruck ; to be caught in the fact of such gallanting in his absence perhaps flashed on her mind, but she was agitated by no single feeling. Thousands would not have sufficed to describe her many mingled emotions ; especially in that moment when Buxton, on entering the apartment, was descried by Miss Julia, who instantly started from her seat, and in the most captivating style possible threw herself with a shriek into the arms of Mrs.

Keckle and swooned away without changing colour; a precaution which, in similar cases, we would earnestly recommend to all young ladies who intend not be deemed frights for the remainder of the evening.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WE have always been great admirers of the early aspect of winter—students, we may say, of the landscape—so much so, that had not the stars decreed it otherwise, we should have been a painter as original and magnificent as our friend Martin in our own peculiar line—at least we think so, and being of that opinion, say so; never having been able to discover any principle in ethics which interdicts a man from speaking well of his dearest friend, himself. Indeed, is it not the very object of moral philosophy to teach those rules and measures of action which lead to happiness, and to acquaint us with the means of employing them? and if so, surely, then, that which gives us pleasure, without harming others, must be in accordance with the

science ; and what does this so much as speaking of our own merits, especially when we are fortunate enough to have any ?

It is not, however, our present purpose to enlarge on this abstruse thesis ; we only happened to advert to it accidentally, from having mentioned our innate admiration of the sublime and beautiful, as they reveal themselves in the scenes which illustrate the impassioned epode of the year, and in consequence of recalling to mind the pains which Nature took on the morning after the arrival of our hero at Gowans to set out the landscape to the best advantage in our peculiar taste.

The rawness of the preceding evening had during the night granulated into hail ; the mountains in the morning looked out from the windows of the clouds with clean white night-caps, and the furrowed fallows of the hill-side spread their striped aprons to keep the scattered sunshine. The green vesture of the lowlands, and the fairy liveries of the meadows were, however, unchanged ; but the streams were here and there darkly roughened by the frequent blast. The village and the

trees were in mezzotinto. The cows, chewing the cud, looked soberly over the farm-yard gate ; and the geese, apart from the pool, stood on one foot, as if their toes were cold. The clown slouched loungingly with ungartered hose, and his hands in his pockets, at the stable door — all around avouched an interregnum of labour. It was the poor man's day, the day of rest.

Among others in the country whom the state of the weather betrayed into the sin of not going to church, was the amiable Miss Julia Sorn. The weather, however, in her case, was not the sole cause, for it would appear by a letter, in which she employed herself in giving an account of the fracas of the preceding evening, that although she had blamed the sleety morning for the chillness of her piety, there was yet another cause as influential. How natural it is to ascribe our faults to other causes than our own predilections !

“ Greenknowes.

“ BELOVED JACINTHA,

“ The die is cast, and my heart is withering. But let me collect my scattered senses, which, like doves scared from the sills of the windows,

are dispersed, I know not whither. Had the man possessed but one single ember of that fire which consumes me, I had not the tale to tell—that is my present terrible topic—alas ! Jacintha, I strive in vain. The dust in the whirlwind, the hail on the blast, would more readily obey my invocation, than the fluttering thoughts which hover in the welkin of my agitated mind.

“He is here—himself—I have seen him ! The lord of the manor of this *ultima Thule* is his friend. Oh ! my distracted heart !—I may say like Bertram, with the change of a word,

‘We met in anguish, and in pain we parted.’

“But I must not indulge in these impassioned flights—No : I will compose myself to describe the affecting scene. My uncle has gone to church to recite a sermon, and my aunt, with the servants, to hear him. The house is all still, but the raging wind without is a calm to the storm in my breast—still in silence and in solitude my fortitude shall be exerted, and the sympathy of my Jacintha awaits the mournful tale. On the invitation of Miss Sibilla Ruart, the most respectable of maiden gentlewomen of

a certain age in this part of the country, we went last night to drink tea at the manor-house, and, as Shakspeare poetically says, 'it was a rough night.' A chimney-pot was blown down; and though the early moon shed but perturbed light as we walked from the manse, as they call a parsonage here, we reached the portal in safety. Scarcely, however, were we seated in the drawing-room, when the sound of coming wheels was heard to 'groan heavily along the distant road,' and the Laird's arrival was announced; but judge of my consternation when he ushered in the fatal youth—my knees trembled—he saw me—he approached with a bland countenance—and I fainted in the arms of the kindest of aunts.

"But distraction and Eumenides! I perceived by a glance his scornful curled lip speak volumes of derision to our host. This was too much; I left the room; the party was marred with most admired disorder. Oh, Jacintha, why do I so love this cruel man? Surely his altered estate might by this time have taught him to esteem a faithful heart—one too, though once so far below him in fortune, would now

make her's the jewel in the toad's head of his adversity.

“ But to proceed. We then returned to the Manse, where, strange to tell, my aunt, with the tenderest of hearts, informed me, that he who was Lord Errington is nephew to the lady of an excellent and learned man hard by. But what is that relationship to me? and what avails such convenient proximity—he loves me not!—What agony is in that little word! and oh, Jacintha to lay my naked heart all palpitating before him, and to know it is rejected, though the doom be yet unpronounced!

“ Sometimes a fond anticipation, a vain hope, brightens in my dark bosom, and I soothe my sorrows with the thought, that perhaps the scorn which that side-long look detected comes of some remaining dregs of his former rank: and then I flatter myself—what will not woman in her passion do?—that when the rugged nurse adversity shall have taught him, with her rigid lore, the extent of his impaired condition, he may perchance then—Oh! sordid thought,—my father's property! So does his mother too hope, and she it was that sug-

gested to me to ask my indulgent father to send me to this heaven; for where he is, is heaven, and he is here. Alas! to me the world has but two places—where he is, and where he is not. My heart is full, and I must conclude to weep.

“JULIA SORN.

“N.B. I had a letter by last post from Mrs. Howard, in which she tells me, that ‘the parson’s daughter’ has shown symptoms of consumption, and has become like a drooping lily, an orange lily, no doubt! for the sentimental creature was always ill-coloured.”

How it happened that Miss Julia was so intimate with our hero’s mother, must be ascribed to that gossiping intercourse which sometimes takes place in the country between the upper servants of the great and the minor neighbours around. We have, however, only to mention the fact, and that Howard had come to Scotland to accomplish, if he could, a union between her and his son—a fruitless project; for as we have already intimated, there was but little disposition on the part of Buxton to come into the scheme. His affections were otherwise en-

gaged, and to the young lady of whom Miss Julia was in the practice of speaking so derogatory in her postscripts.

This rival was an only child, like herself, the daughter of the Reverend Mr. Ingleton, rector of the parish of Errington. Our hero, during his residence at the Castle, subsequently to his return from Oxford, had made himself acquainted—as the physician's heiress said—with the young woman, and from that time he had, as Miss Julia thought, become less frequent in his visits to her or to her father. It was indeed the talk of all the parish that his young Lordship had fallen in love with the parson's daughter—as, in allusion to the unfortunate heroine of Bürger's ballad, the gentle, meek, and unobtrusive Caroline was in consequence called by Miss Julia and her chagrined associates, although nothing in the character of the hero resembled that of "the lord so frank and free," and far less in the mild and beautiful object of his respect, to justify them in their disparaging comparison to "the lass of fair Wonne."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE residence of Mr. and Mrs. Palmer was next morning a scene of expectation. They had received notice that their nephew was arrived; and as he had been a lord, they could not divest themselves of the idea that he still retained something of the quality; accordingly, not doubting he would early pay them a visit, they prepared themselves for the occasion.

The boys at the academy obtained a holiday. When the Dominie met them in the morning in the school-room, he intimated, that if they would request "the play" in a suitable manner, perhaps he might indulge them; and accordingly a self-elected committee of the cleverest undertook to prepare the address, and presently about half a dozen laid

their heads together at one of the desks, and three different petitions were drawn out. One that looked like Greek, another in Latin, that would have reflected honour on the learning of a metropolitan physician, and a third in verse, in which were lines—Shakspeare himself has written worse.

The mistress herself at home was not slack. Before breakfast she had dressed herself to receive becomingly a visitor of consideration. But she was a little embarrassed, nevertheless, for it chanced to be washing-day, an occurrence of some importance to her domestic economy, and long before she had come down-stairs the operations were in progress. This was a subject of deep regret between her and the Dominie, and they discussed the propriety of suspending them for that day, while in consultation during breakfast—and suspended accordingly they were.

No time was squandered unnecessarily at the breakfast-table. Mr. Palmer went immediately to the school-room, and gladdened the ears of his disciples as we have related; and his thorough-going lady soon put the house properly

in order. Having wiped the dust from off the Hebrew Bible that adorned the unmolested upper shelf of "the master's" study, she brought it out, and laid it on the parlour-table, that her high-bred nephew might see the learning of his uncle; other books, which also betokened literature and philosophy, were likewise scattered about in conspicuous places.

The ornaments of the mantel-shelf were cleaned and debonairly arranged. Even the watch that hung over it, in a painted paper orloge—a boarding-school present from the sister of a pupil—was wound up, though it was not customary to do so until the master returned home with the results of his astronomical observation at noon. The minor maiden, alias the lassie, whose special duty it was to open the hall-door, was directed to appear in her best, and particularly in shoes and stockings, for in those days such luxuries were only allowed in Greenknowes on Sunday. It is true, they are not yet of universal indulgence even in Edinburgh.

Fortunately, Mrs. Palmer, among her various accomplishments, had not her match in the

country side at making a seed cake; her recipe has been borrowed by Mrs. Rundell, and is one of the most ingenious in the economical culinary treatise of that judicious and frugal gentlewoman, with this difference, that she has omitted the flour of cinnamon, which our friend has often declared to us was much cheaper and better for flavouring than nutmeg. Owing to her skill in this art, Mrs. Palmer was never without a sweet and savoury cake to treat her visitors withal; but on this occasion she had only the debris of one that had been most excellent; they were however sufficient, and not being stale, she justly thought they would bear witness to the genteel habitudes of the academy, and afford her an opportunity of saying that a new cake was required, and that it was a neglect to let the house be so nearly run out.

Farthermore, she ordered two bottles of wine to be decanted—one of port and another of currant, as delicious as molasses, and of her own making. These, with glasses, all in readiness, were placed beside the plate of cake ostentatiously on the side-board, according to the

most approved fashion and hospitality of market-towns, on market days, and of boroughs on the eve of an election.

By the time that these expedient preparations were completed, the hour approached at which the kinsman who had been noble was expected; and accordingly the Dominie seated himself in his easy-chair at the chimney corner; his lady took the seat opposite; and they both began at the same time to twirl their thumbs, and to observe to each other that the day was overcast. But long were they thus occupied in vain; their kinsman came not, and the boys, who had been purposely kept back in their dinner for a full hour, grew at last so clamorous, that it was found necessary to let the house resume its wonted freedom, and the nymphs of the hot water to return to their tubs.

Two days having passed, and no appearance of the nephew, it was concluded that he did not intend to visit them, and the Dominie, with offended pride—for he felt more on the occasion than his wife—resolved not to call on him. The house thus fell into its wonted dishabille; the cake was all eaten; the interruption which the

washing had sustained, prevented another from being made till the ironing-day was over, and Mrs. Palmer was busy with her petticoat kilted in the washing-house, superintending her damsels, when a knocking of no common confidence was heard at the hall-door.

Never was household regent taken so aback ; it was her nephew and Mr. Ralston—all was confusion and bustle,—the strangers were shown into the parlour by the most ravelled of the maidens, until her mistress was fit to be seen—every thing was out of place ; the breakfast equipage was still on the table, with a bottle and a glass, from which encouragement had been administered to the Naiades of the wash ; but the Hebrew Bible fortunately lay on the side-board ; nevertheless, the scene did not surprise either the Laird or our hero ; on the contrary, they moved about the room with indifference, till the Bible attracted their attention, and on looking into it, they smiled to observe that the leaves were still uncut.

At last, by and by, the lady entered, and “the master” was sent for to the school ; but he not being quite in trim, and moreover, not in

the best of humours with the value which, in his opinion, had been set upon his connexion, excused himself, and Mrs. Palmer was disconcerted. However, her nephew, who saw that he had intruded unexpectedly, endeavoured to soothe her with those little pleasing attentions which the good-natured and the polite, who are the artificial good-natured, know so well how to practise, that he quite won her heart—in so much, that when the Dominie returned from the school, after the strangers had departed, there was no end to her encomiums, and in the same colloquy it was resolved that the visit should be returned next day.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FRANKS, on reaching London, had the mortification to find his father was resolved to close the concerns of his house. He had, indeed, only this alternative or to stop payment, for the ravages of the French armies had done indescribable injury to his correspondents; and it was only in consequence of the prudence of his determination to wind-up, that his friends had come forward and rescued him from a greater humiliation.

The immediate effect of the measure was to deprive the old gentleman of the means of indulging his generosity. Compelled to require pecuniary assistance himself, he could not extend it to others; nor did it accord with his just notions of mercantile probity to increase

the difficulties to his creditors by any gratification of feeling towards even the unfortunate.

The state of his circumstances he disclosed to his son on the evening of his return, and also the strict principles on which he felt it was his duty to act.

Distressing as the information was to himself, young Franks, aware of its vital importance to Buxton, was more affected than his father had expected. But as we have a particular fancy for letting every one tell his own story, especially when the matter tends to illustrate either individual feeling or character, the letter which he wrote to the Laird on the occasion will be more to the purpose than any thing we could pen on the subject. The manuscript certainly, like many other as valuable documents, has suffered some damage, in consequence, tradition says, of Miss Sibby Ruart opening it rather too hastily, at the request of the Laird, who had hurt his left hand by some sportsman's accident when on the moors with our hero.

“ London.

“ MY DEAR FRIEND,

“ I write under extreme depression. You have heard by this time of the phantastic tricks

playing at Berlin. The result has been so prejudicial to many of my father's German correspondents, that it must be long before they are in a condition to recover themselves, and it has therefore been determined to break up his mercantile house, which for more than a hundred and fifty years has been of the first rank in London. Were the dissolution of this respectable firm the only cause I have for regret, it would not affect me deeply, having chosen another mode of life; but to meet the embarrassments arising from the interruption in his remittances, my father has been obliged to solicit assistance from his friends, and until they are repaid, he considers himself as a trustee for them, and not at liberty even to think of any reversion.

“ You know both the generosity and the rigid principles of the old gentleman, and therefore I need not say that you will regard this resolution on Mr. Buxton's account as no slight addition to his peculiar misfortunes. For myself, I can think only of the fatality which seems to pursue him; but say nothing of what I have mentioned to himself, until I shall have had more time to consult my father again.

“The more I reflect on the case of poor Buxton, I am the wider bewildered; plucked from such affluence to be left so forlorn, and yet without the stain of any fault! I met this morning several of our former associates, but only one of them all inquired if I knew what had become of ‘My Lord,’ with a sneer; and in speaking of his disaster, laughingly called it ‘a queer turn up.’ This is, perhaps, deserving of little notice, as the remark was made by that brainless rattle Humphries; but the expression was to me odiously rancid, and I fear the feeling by which it was dictated is, with different degrees of acrimony, common to many who used to regard his title as the chief merit of the man.

“I have had another trial less vital, but of a more painful kind. Mrs. Howard called on me last night; the espionage of these people is perfectly Parisian; for I had not been many hours in London before she found me out. The precise object of her visit was not obvious, nor even easily discovered, for although Buxton says she has ever been truly his mother, there is a sinister sagacity about her that renders her

difficult to be understood by strangers. I don't like her, and yet it would not be easy to say wherefore: her heart may be kind but her head rules it.

"When she entered the room I was suddenly interested in her appearance. She no longer wore that demeanour of propriety which made her seem so respectable at Errington Castle. She was evidently out of countenance, but it was not with diffidence; on the contrary, it was with something that I cannot better describe than as resolute confidence—not confidence felt, but put on in bravery. I did not imagine that fortitude could assume a front so offensive.

"After a few words of preliminary recognition, she inquired how I had left her son. I ought not to have been startled at the question, but it did surprise me, and I said somewhat particularly,

"'Is he your son?' and before she had time to answer, I subjoined, 'and if he be, how could you, as a mother, consent to let him be so injured?'

"The reply was curious, and I suspect characteristic.

“‘It was all my Lady’s fault ; neither his father nor I would have broken our vow of secrecy.’

“‘Then it was by the rashness of Lady Erington that the mischief has been done?’

“‘It was, Sir; and it is a misfortune that can never now be redeemed ;’ so saying, she wiped her watery eyes, for actually they did fill with real tears.

“‘I am afraid, Mrs. Howard,’ and I was obliged to strangle a sneer, ‘that he thinks himself the injury began at his birth.’

“‘So he says,’ was her answer ; ‘but how could that be, when, had my Lady been sufficiently on her guard, he might have lived a life of grandeur and nobility ? It never was either his father’s intention or mine to have been a molestation ; few young men have had ever the chance of happiness that he has lost by his wilfulness.’

“That she vaguely thought some charm existed in grandeur and nobility was evident, and the singularity of her observation led me to say,

“ ‘How could he have known the difference between a station of dignity and affluence, and one of an opposite kind, not having the means of comparison ; without these, he could not be sensible of his advantages. Surely, Mrs. Howard, you must have seen enough of the world to convince you that wealth and greatness do not make happiness.’

“ ‘But they well help,’ replied the sordid woman ; ‘and it is a great help also to have, like the Quality, the freedom of our own will.’

“ ‘To this I could make no reply ; but to hasten to a conclusion an interview which was very disagreeable, I said,

“ ‘Mr. Buxton was quite well when I left Edinburgh, and was on the point of going with a Mr. Ralston into the country for a short time.’

“ ‘So he thought he should, as he told me himself ; but as you did not accompany him, you cannot know how he liked my relations.’

“ ‘Relations ! what relations ?’

“ ‘My sister and her husband ; they reside near Mr. Ralston ; and the clergyman’s lady of the parish is a sister to Dr. Sorn, who dined at

the castle when—' (Here the breadth of the seal is torn away.)

"Her colour changed, and I relieved her by saying,

" 'I perfectly recollect him. The pale meagre gentleman with the sentimental daughter. Mr. Buxton used to encourage her to make love to him.'

" 'Oh, Sir, would he could now be brought to do so with sincerity,' was the answer of this sinister person. 'She will have on the death of her father a good twenty thousand pounds.'

" 'That certainly would indemnify him in a small degree for what has been taken from him.'

" 'It would, indeed, Sir, and enable us all to live in sober gentility, as we should do.'

" 'Have you ever spoken of this to himself, Mrs. Howard?'

" 'That I have, but he's of an obstinacious temper: were you, however, whom he so much respects, to put in a word—'

" 'Yes, were I to put in a word, as you say, Mrs. Howard, who knows what might come to pass?'

“ ‘It would be a great blessing ; for what can he do, pennyless as he now is ?’

“ ‘You speak with the anxieties of a mother, but I apprehend he will think of the subject himself.’

“ ‘Ah, Sir, there are times when the boldest need encouragement, and he has not yet come properly to his reason. It would be his salvation, if a marriage could be brought about with Miss Julia.’

“ ‘I could, my dear Ralston, endure no more, but rising coldly, said with all the formality in my power ‘I will think on it,’ and with unaltered steadiness opened the door, intimating with a stiff bow, what your friend Miss Sibby Ruart used to say, ‘her absence would be a cordial.’

“ ‘I have thus given you a recital as particular of this interview as my memory can supply ; and I have only to observe, that it has sadly deepened my sympathy for the ill-fated Buxton ; for with all his innate high-mindedness, there is no snapping the downward drag that connects him with such parentage : say, however, nothing to him of Mrs. Howard’s visit

to me. I ought not, however, to offer any suggestion, as your own calm discretion is far better than the rash promptings of the impulses to which it is my nature to be subject.

“ Ever yours,

“ HENRY FRANKS.”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE situation of our hero with the Laird was irksome. His uncle and aunt were disagreeable to his taste, and the residence of the romantic Miss Julia at the Manse still more so; nor did the prying temper and inquisitive habits of Miss Sibby Ruart tend to soothe his increasing irritation. As far as the sports of the field could alleviate vexation, no endeavour, it is true, was wanting on the part of Mr. Ralston to keep his attention occupied; but the weather was often unpropitious, and though he occasionally enjoyed the moors, he had not that degree of relish in them which gave his host such keen pleasure. On the contrary, his inclinations were more indoor and sedentary. Compared with the gratification which

he received in reading, the Nimrod pastimes in which he participated with his host were often to him as unsatisfactory as mere labour.

When prevented by the rain from taking the field, he was particularly beset with his own comfortless reflections, for the Laird, like the generality of his class in Scotland, had no library; and the billiard-table, purchased when he was last in Edinburgh, though it had arrived safe, was not yet set up. In a word, Stanley Buxton felt himself at Gowans out of his element; and before the letter recently quoted had been received from Mr. Franks, his cogitations were chiefly employed in concerting a plausible excuse for returning to London. An aimless crave was upon him, and he vainly thought a change of place would produce an alteration on himself.

That his mind oscillated without purpose, was obvious to Mr. Ralston, and gave him serious uneasiness, especially after the receipt of the letter; for it could then no longer be judiciously concealed that he ought at once to enter on the course of life he intended to pursue.

Accordingly, notwithstanding the wish expressed by Mr. Franks that the state of his father's circumstances should not be disclosed, the Laird discreetly considered that it would be to encourage fallacious hopes to leave the chattering uninformed of the determination which constrained the old gentleman to withhold his generosity. Thus both parties were prepared unconsciously for an explanation, and the wetness of the day succeeding that on which the letter had come to hand, facilitated the opportunity.

They were sitting together at the parlour fireside, (Miss Sibby being absent, on household cares intent,) when the Laird, with that innate delicacy of sentiment for which he was greatly distinguished, although of a disposition not too harshly described as unintellectual and indolent, mentioned that by the last post he had heard from their friend.

"I have been in some doubt," said he, "whether I ought to mention the subject at present to you, as you have anxieties sufficient of your own; but nevertheless I am so sure of your sympathy for Franks, that it would be

doing injustice not to let you know how much he may need it."

"Then it is as we apprehended?" replied our hero; "his father is among the sufferers by the commercial restrictions—is it so?"

"To a certain extent, but the friends of the old gentleman have relieved him from the immediate pressure."

Mr. Ralston would have added something farther, but, surprised at a change in the countenance of his unfortunate guest, he stopped for a moment suddenly, and then added:

"But nothing like bankruptcy is apprehended; indeed, I understand the reversion will be considerable."

"How can I, Mr. Ralston, think of accepting his generosity in such circumstances? I will not—I cannot," said Buxton with a sigh.

The tone of this resolution was, however, so firm, that it gave pleasure to the kind-hearted Laird, and saved him from the necessity of making any explanation respecting the determination which Mr. Franks senior had, in his integrity, adopted; but with more address than usual he remarked,

"I anticipated some decision of that kind from you ; it is not, however, requisite that you should make up your mind so hastily."

"I am more deliberate, my friend, than you imagine ; I have thought much, and deeply too, of the gracious intentions which both the father and son have shown towards me ; but I fear they have, like myself, allowed themselves to imagine that some chance is still in my unhappy destiny by which I may be rescued from the grasps of the ruin that has laid hold on me. For some time, even till I came to this place, a phantom has haunted me, and attempted to persuade me that I am but involved in the cloud of a mystery that will soon clear away, and leave me again in the sunshine. I begin, however, now to discern my true condition. I am recovering the shock of my fall, and can no longer flatter myself with being aught else than helpless. Pardon the egotism, Mr. Ralston, but every day augments the injustice I encourage against myself, by allowing so much time to pass in idleness and sequestration : my lot is cast, and I cannot too soon apply myself to the issue."

"You speak like a stoic," said his friend,

"but have you considered how inadequately you have been prepared for the business of the world?"

"I have all the preparation, Mr. Ralston, that thought can give; and the lack that is in my habitudes, time and endeavour will teach an earnest spirit to supply."

"You are, then, determined to try the bar? It offers but a barren prospect without patronage."

"There is no other profession open to me."

"The church;" said the Laird, eagerly recalling to mind the hint and admonition he had received from Franks.

"It suits not my inclinations; and yet I am not one that looks lightly on religion; but piety is an effusion of the heart, and mine is of a more arid substance than to yield it. It is a secretion of the constitutional temperament, and the glands and organs that extricate it, are, I fear, in me obdurate and small; could I have felt in myself the influence that pervades the religious bosom, I had chosen the church, and might not in her service have missed the happiness that was once within my reach."

Mr. Ralston, not exactly understanding to what he alluded, replied,

“ You consider things too finely. In the church Lord Errington has great patronage.”

“ But it is in my nature,—the very creature and spirit of my education,” said Buxton,—“ to hold and cling to high notions, perhaps unsuitable notions of purity and independence. To betake myself with these to the ecclesiastical profession, would be something akin to the fraud from which I am suffering. I should have to put on a mask, and be abject with the consciousness of the hypocrisy.”

“ Pardon me,” exclaimed the Laird, “ but this high-mindedness will mar your ambition. It has already cost you a vast fortune and a peerage.”

“ It has saved me, however, from a marriage in which I saw only misery.”

“ How ! have you not often told us that, but in not being to your liking, the minion of the dowager was rich in graces, and without fault ?”

“ She was ; but in that defect there was enough, for my heart was betrothed, and only these same little scruples, the bastard fancies of

aristocracy, made me hesitate to indulge my wishes. Fortunately the beloved object has been spared from sharing my disastrous fortunes."

"Who was she?"

"The daughter of the rector of Errington—I may tell you so much—nor can it molest her meek and gentle spirit to hear, that when I was a lord I would have made her my wife, but for a diffidence, a cowardly respect for rank, which even while it restrained me, was in its nature so virtuous, that I could not think of her in a less holy condition. But I am well punished, the rank that made me hesitate has passed from me, and in the privation, the greatest of my pangs is, that I should have been so reluctant in my love. But she has escaped. I grow, however, weak and romantic, so let the tale be ended."

"And yet what is in its circumstances that you should look on it in that desponding way?" replied the Laird; "she yet may be yours, would you but consent to consider your situation a little more worldly."

"No more of that, my friend. By the letter from Franks, my decision is riveted; I will therefore return without delay to the metropolis,

and like the hero of the fairy tale, espouse my fortune."

"You are not however, surely, resolved to forego the friendship which Lord Errington offered you when the discovery took place."

"I do not say I will : but he knows well how much I stand in need of his aid—and therefore, though I partake not of that feeling which my father felt when repulsed by his Lordship, for obtruding a representation for me, or rather for himself——"

At this moment the Laird happened to glance his eye towards the footpath, across the bean-field, and observed with surprise, on account of the showery and blustering state of the weather, the large and clumsy corpulency of the Rev. Mr. Keckle, coming towards the house, in his tartan cloak, with his throat well protected by a scarlet comforter, and his limbs by dark blue rig and furrow worsted stockings drawn over his knees. He was making use of his umbrella as a staff—the violence of the wind precluding him from applying it to its proper purpose during the squally shower that was then in lavish and visible spray coursing the fields.

CHAPTER XXXV.

WHEN the reverend gentleman had doffed his defensive garments, and deposited his umbrella in the hall, he was shown into the parlour by Dick, the Laird's own man ; and presently Miss Sibby Ruart, hearing who was the visitor, came into the room, conceiving that she had at all times the privilege of the *entré* when the minister was there ; and convinced, which prompted her to use it on this occasion, that no trifling business had induced his reverence to come abroad in such tempestuous weather.

"It's a sore day, Mr. Keckle, for you to be out of the house in," said she ; "but business must not stand for wind or wave, and how is Mrs. Keckle, and that sweet young lady, your niece. I hope nothing is the matter with them?"

The two gentlemen in the mean time made way for the minister to come near the fire. And our hero placed a cool chair for him, a touch of the polite observances of his former sphere: one less delicate in applying the principles of refined manners, perhaps the Laird himself, would have offered his own seat, than which nothing is so obtuse that looks like politeness; for a heated chair is, in the first sensation, very unpleasant, and to request a stranger to sit on one, has as little of Chesterfield in the courtesy, as to send a note to a great man, or a young lady, closed with a wafer—an impertinence, which Miss Edgeworth, who first made the discovery of the reason wherefore, has extensively established as such, to the manifest advantage of the sealing-wax makers.

When the party had accommodated themselves round the hearth, Mr. Keckle, beginning with Mr. Ralston, the master of the mansion, expressed in solemn sounding periods his satisfaction at the appearance of the good health which they severally seemed to enjoy, and to which due responses were made. Miss Sibby adding to her thanksgiving for the congratula-

tion, a hope that he himself would not take cold by being abroad in such boisterous weather.

"But," said she, "in the way of our duty it will happen, now and then, that we must face the blast; at the same time, Mr. Keckle, unless it be an occasion of instancy, the care of our own health is a point that should be always considered. I hope the obligation that has brought you frae the chimla-lugg of the Manse on such a day as this, is nothing anent our family?"

"Indeed, Miss Sybilla," replied the reverend gentleman, "I am none surprised at your amazement at seeing me forth; but unless I had come this forenoon, I could not answer the doctor's letter by the morn's post."

"And so ye have had a letter? and how was Dr. Sorn? it must have been about something, or ye would not be so particular? surely it does not concern anybody here?"

Without replying to her manifold interrogatories, Mr. Keckle looked to our hero, and said when it was convenient, he would be glad of a word with him in privacy. And before an answer could be obtained, Miss Sibby ob-

served that the drawing-room fire was not yet lighted, but it should be immediately for them, and the shutters opened ; and rising she left the parlour to give the necessary orders to the housemaid. As soon, however, as she had quitted the room, Mr. Buxton said,

“ If your communication respect only me, there is no reason why I should not hear it in the presence of my friend Mr. Ralston.”

The minister, however, leaving his seat at the same moment, replied,

“ As it concerns others, I do not allow to be myself rightly justified,” and looking at Miss Sibby, who then re-entered the room, added, “ to make it public.”

Our hero rose and followed him to the drawing-room.

“ Is not this a very extraordinary visitation, Mr. Ralston?” observed the lady to her kinsman, when the strangers had retired ; “ what can it be about ? and all in consequence of a letter from Mrs. Keckle’s brother, the doctor at the town of Errington. Think you it’s possible that there has been another detection, or that it’s an interference about that drookt

damsel, Miss Julie ; droocket she well deserves to be called, for she sits at the window, as Mrs. Keckle told me herself, from morning to night, with a tear in her eye as big as a blob of dew in a kailblade. She's really a weak maiden, or she would not let her regard for Mr. Buxton kithe in the way it does, seeing how little he conceits her : I would let my heart break first ; but it's well known of what incontinent metal the Englishers, especially their young women, are made."

" True," said the Laird with a smile, " they certainly have not the mildness and modesty of our Scottish fair."

" That's a most righteous remark, Mr. Ralston ; and now when I think of it, and the ins and outs of Mr. Buxton's kittle situation, I would not wonder if the minister has come with a temptation to try if he will marry her ; for Mrs. Keckle has told me that the Doctor is out of the body about Miss, she being his only child, and that he would not object to her marrying the wild Scot of Galloway, so that she was happy ; indeed she says he's a pattern to fathers, and some have experienced that every

father is not so indulgent to his only daughter."

"Really," replied Mr. Ralston, "I know you were an only child, Miss Sibby, but I was not aware your father had ever controlled your affections."

"None of your jeers, cousin," cried the Spinster; "it's little ye know, but if my father had not put a restraint upon me, how would I have been living to this time of day in a state of single blessedness, which I am not ashamed to acknowledge, nor should any respectable woman be, who has seen with her own eyes the blind partialities of man. But don't you think that the minister and Mr. Buxton have some weighty affair in hand that causes them to bide so long?"

At this juncture the two gentlemen returned into the parlour, and Miss Sibby, as she afterwards told us, investigated their countenances with a scrutinizing eye, but they had so covered them with obscurity, that she could not make out by any sign in them, what their secret sederant had been about--only that Mr. Keckle was a disappointed man, and Mr. Buxton little

better. In some respects, however, the shrewd spinster had not been incorrect in her conjectures; for the object of the minister's visit, was indeed a matrimonial proposal, of which our hero gave an account to Mr. Franks in the following letter, written on the same day.

“Gowans.

“MY DEAR FRIEND,

With inexpressible pain I have heard from Mr. Ralston of your misfortune. It will not surprise you that, although assured the embarrassment is only temporary, I should yet determine, with the fullest sense of obligation, not to avail myself, under such circumstances, of your father's kind intentions. I ought to add that I cannot sufficiently admire the delicacy of our friend towards me, in withholding your letter; for I apprehend the news is worse than he has described, and that he has been actuated by a wish not to increase my anxieties at this time; sharp, however, as they are, they are not so acute as to make me insensible to the part I ought to perform.

My intention now is to return in the course of a few days to London, and having already

entered myself of the Temple, to commence my professional studies. I have heard of other men who, while so engaged, have supported themselves by their pen, and my intention is to try what may be in my power in that way. Be not therefore surprised if you do not find me so eager a companion as I have been of late, nor allow yourself to believe, though hereafter for a time we seldomer meet, I shall ever regard you with less esteem, or forget your kindness when I stood most in need of a friend.

“This morning I had another adventure. The clergyman of this parish, who is brother-in-law to Dr. Sorn, called on me with a letter from the Doctor, in which, after condoling with me on the condition I have been reduced to, and alluding to his daughter, he in a plain common-sense manner, which enhanced the obligation, told me that he had understood from herself she was devotedly attached to me, and that he was willing, in consequence, to settle on her two-thirds of his fortune, to secure, as he was pleased to say, her happiness with mine. Environed as I am with poverty, was not this a singular interposition? But

you know the fanciful character of the young lady, to whom I have been to blame for the false preference I affected towards her in other circumstances, and cannot therefore be greatly astonished that I should reject the Godsend ; for as such the minister, a homely, good sort of person, neither eminent for wisdom nor tact, described it. He argued at some length on the subject, representing how much it would diminish to me the hardships that I must otherwise endure, and how many young men in the world would envy my good fortune, even if their own case did not render it so necessary to them. I was, however, fixed ; but, to tell the truth, my refusal was not without a sordid pang, and I wished she had been a little more endowed with discretion. But had she been so, would she have ever offered herself to me, suspecting, as she does, that my heart is not to give ?

“ The scene with her uncle did not conclude the drama—one more romantic succeeded. Having exhausted his persuasion, he then presented me with a note from herself, the contents of which would amuse you ; but here and there it

scintillates with a sprinkling of natural sensibility, that makes me reluctant to expose it even to you: one sentence does, in fact, do her credit! She says that sensible of the indecorum of a woman offering her hand and fortune to a man, she is still not ashamed to do so, because she is convinced that in my altered circumstances I would not offer myself to her. This is prettily imagined of the poor fond creature, and would have been almost eloquent, but for the vile phrase "altered," which would seem to imply that she thinks the change only has prevented her from having some chance. However, I am as obdurate as a stone, and the incident itself hastens me to leave this place. Our friend makes no comment on the transaction, but his kinswoman, Miss Ruart, who has hazarded some cunning guesses towards the object of the minister's visit, animadvert on the wilfulness of 'the male sek,' as she calls us, and insinuates that in her day it was not the custom for young ladies to make themselves so cheap.

"Yours,

"STANLEY BUXTON."

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

